

Hazardous Materials Incidents

Hazardous materials are substances that if released or misused can pose a threat to the environment or health. Because hazardous materials are transported on our roadways, railways, waterways and pipelines every day, a hazardous materials incident can happen anywhere and you need to be prepared in case an incident occurs near you.

Chemical manufacturers are one source of hazardous materials, but there are many others, including service stations, hospitals, and hazardous materials waste sites. Many hazardous materials do not have any odor, and may only be detected once physical symptoms like watering eyes or nausea occur. Some hazardous materials can cause death, serious injury, long-lasting health effects, and damage to buildings and property.

How to Prepare for a Hazardous Materials Incident

- Get an emergency supply kit that includes enough provisions for you and your family to live on for a minimum of three days. Be sure to include plastic sheeting, duct tape and scissors in your emergency kit.
- Make an emergency plan for you and your family.
- Find out if your community has a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). LEPCs collect information about hazardous materials in the community and make this information available upon request. The LEPC may also have an emergency plan to respond to hazardous materials emergencies in the community, and can tell you ways the public will be notified if an incident does happen.

What to do if a Hazardous Materials Incident Occurs

- Listen to local radio or television stations for detailed information and instructions.
- If you witness a hazardous materials incident, spill or leak, call 911, your local emergency number or the fire department as soon as possible. Avoid contact with any spilled liquid materials, airborne mist or condensed solid deposit.
- Stay away from the incident area to minimize the risk of contamination.
- If you are caught outside during an incident, try to stay upstream, uphill and upwind. Hazardous materials can be transported quickly by water and wind.
- In general, try to go at least one-half mile (10 city blocks) from the incident area.

- If you are in a vehicle, stop and seek shelter in a permanent building. If you must remain in your car, keep car windows and vents closed and shut off the air conditioner and heater.
- If you are told to evacuate, do so immediately.
- If you are requested to stay indoors or shelter-in-place:
 - Close and lock all exterior doors and windows. Close vents, fireplace dampers, and as many interior doors as possible.
 - Turn off air conditioners and ventilation systems. In large buildings, set ventilation systems to 100 percent recirculation so that no outside air is drawn into the building. If this is not possible, ventilation systems should be turned off.
 - Go into a pre-selected shelter room. This room should be above ground and have the fewest openings to the outside.
 - Seal the room by covering each window, door, and vent using plastic sheeting and duct tape. Use material to fill cracks and holes in the room, such as those around pipes.
 - Keep your body fully covered and wear gloves, socks and shoes even though these measures may offer minimal protection.
 - Avoid eating or drinking any food or water that may be contaminated.

What to do After a Hazardous Materials Incident

- Return home only when authorities say it is safe. Open windows and vents and turn on fans to provide ventilation.
- Act quickly if you have come into contact with or have been exposed to hazardous materials:
 - Follow decontamination instructions from local authorities. You may be advised to take a thorough shower, or you may be advised to stay away from water and follow another procedure.
 - Seek medical treatment for unusual symptoms as soon as possible.
 - Place exposed clothing and shoes in tightly sealed containers. Do not allow them to contact other materials. Call local authorities to find out about proper disposal.
 - Advise everyone who comes into contact with you that you may have been exposed to a hazardous material.
- Find out from local authorities how to clean up your land and property.
- Report any lingering vapors or other hazards to your local emergency services office.

For additional information, visit www.health.pa.gov or www.pema.pa.gov.