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Hazardous Materials Incidents

Hazardous materials are substances, which, because of their chemical, physical or biological nature, pose a potential risk to life, health and property if they are released. Hazards can exist during production, storage, transportation, use or disposal.

What to do in a Hazardous Materials Incident

- If you witness a hazardous materials incident, dial 911.
- Avoid the incident site to minimize risk of contamination or exposure.
- If you are caught outside during an incident, try to stay up-stream, uphill and upwind.
- If you are in a car, close windows and shut-off ventilation.
- For a poison emergency, call 800-222-1222.

Shelter-in-Place Tips (Stay Indoors)

- Follow instructions given by emergency authorities.
- Reduce toxic vapors from entering your home by sealing entry routes and closing doors and windows.
- Turn off all ventilation systems.
- Close all fireplace dampers.
- Seal gaps around window air conditioning units, kitchen exhaust fan grills, stove and dryer vents with duct tape.
- Close as many internal doors as possible.
- If warned of a potential outdoor explosion, close drapes, curtains and shades and stay away from windows to prevent injury from breaking glass.
- Stay in protected interior areas of the building where toxic vapors are reduced.
- Listen to news media for instructions.

If Evacuation is Recommended, Do So Immediately

- Listen to battery-powered radio for instructions.
- If time permits, close all windows and turn off ventilation systems to minimize contamination.
- Use travel routes recommended by local authorities.
- Avoid contact with spilled liquid materials, airborne mists or condensed solid chemical deposit.
- Do not eat or drink food or water that may have been contaminated.

What to Do After an Incident

- Do not return home until authorities say it is safe.
 - Upon returning home, open windows, doors and turn on fans to provide ventilation.
- If a person or item has been exposed to hazardous chemicals, follow the procedures below:
- Follow decontamination instructions from local authorities.
 - Seek medical treatment for symptoms that may be related to hazardous materials release.
 - If medical help is not immediately available and you might be contaminated, remove your clothes, shower and put on clean clothes.
 - Seek medical help as soon as possible.
 - Place exposed clothing in a sealed container and find out proper disposal procedure.
 - Find out from local authorities on how to clean up your land and property.

To obtain information about an industrial or non-industrial emergency/non-emergency event, you may contact the Community Awareness and Emergency Response (CAER) Line at 281-476-2237.

Biological Threats

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

If there is a Biological Threat

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV broadcast. You might get a telephone call or emergency response workers may come to your door. In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities consider in danger?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

Chemical Threats

A chemical attack is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment.

Possible Signs of Chemical Threat

- Many people suffering from watery eyes, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing or losing coordination.
- Many sick or dead birds, fish or small animals are also a cause for suspicion.

If You See Signs of Chemical Attack

- Find clean air quickly.
- Quickly try to define the impacted area or where the chemical is coming from, if possible.
- Take immediate action to get away.
- If the chemical is inside a building where you are, get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area, if possible.
- If you can't get out of the building or find clean air without passing through the area where you see signs of a chemical attack, it may be better to move as far away as possible and "shelter-in-place."
- If you are outside, quickly determine the fastest way to find clean air. Consider if you can get out of the area or if you should go inside the closest building and "shelter-in-place."

If You Think You Have Been Exposed to a Chemical

- If your eyes are watering or your skin is stinging, or if you are having trouble breathing, you may have been exposed to a chemical.
- If you think you may have been exposed to a chemical, strip immediately and wash.
- Look for a hose, fountain, or any source of water, and wash with soap if possible.

Radiological Incidents

Nuclear Blast

A nuclear blast is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles around. While experts may predict at this time that a nuclear attack is less likely than other types, terrorism by its nature is unpredictable.

Radiation

A radiation threat, commonly referred to as a “dirty bomb” or “radiological dispersion device (RDD),” is the use of common explosives to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area. It is not a nuclear blast. While the explosion will be immediately obvious, the presence of radiation will not be clearly defined until trained personnel with specialized equipment are on the scene.

Radioactive Materials

Radioactive materials are in daily use in the medical and manufacturing industries and are transported on a regular basis by car and truck through the city. As with any radiation, you want to try to limit exposure by reducing the time you spend in the vicinity of a source of radiation, increasing your distance from the source, and by shielding yourself by positioning dense objects between you and the source. It is important to avoid breathing radiological dust that may be released in the air.

Influenza and Pandemic Flu

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of the flu. It occurs when a new flu virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population. A pandemic is different from seasonal flu, in that seasonal outbreaks are caused by viruses to which people have previously been exposed. It attacks the nose, throat and lungs in people. Anyone, including healthy people, can get the flu.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Unlike the common cold, symptoms of the flu come on quickly, one to four days after the virus enters the body. These symptoms include:

- Sudden fever (100.4° F or more)
- Headache
- Tiredness, sometimes extreme
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion, body aches
- Children may have an ear infection, nausea or vomiting

Generally, people start feeling better after the body’s temperature returns to normal, in about three days. Tiredness and cough may last for several weeks.

How do you get the flu?

Flu is very contagious. It can be caught from breathing in the air from someone sneezing, coughing or talking. Touching something with the flu viruses on it, such as doorknobs or handrails, and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth also spread the flu. People can spread flu from one day before they show symptoms, to seven days after symptoms go away.

What can I do to protect myself?

Wash your hands frequently, especially after having contact with someone with a respiratory infection. Also, avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth, and stay home if you are sick.