

Fact Sheet

Hazardous Materials

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FEMA

A hazardous material (hazmat) is any solid, liquid, or gas that can harm people, other living organisms, property, or the environment. Chemical manufacturers, distributors and vendors are sources of hazardous materials, as are hazardous materials waste sites and many users, including service stations and hospitals.

Spills or releases can happen during production, storage, transportation, use, or disposal. Most incidents occur at a “fixed facility,” such as an industrial plant. Also common are railroads, highways, pipelines and waterways. Homes, businesses and schools located near the site of a hazardous materials spill or release are likely to be unaffected unless the substance is airborne and poses a threat to areas outside the accident site, or contaminates a water source for a municipal water system.

Federal, State and local regulations, plans and programs combine to minimize the risk to the public and the environment. You can protect yourself by learning about hazardous materials, possible risks in your community and how you should respond in a hazardous materials emergency.

Know Your Risk and What to Do

- Contact your local emergency management office or Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to learn about community emergency plans and what you should include in your own family and personal emergency plans.
- Get additional information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.fema.gov), American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) and Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov).
- Inquire about emergency plans and procedures at your child’s school, your workplace, and nursing home, assisted living or day care center where a member of your family receives care.
- Make a family disaster plan that includes out-of-town contacts and locations to reunite if you become separated. Be sure everyone knows home, work and cell phone numbers, and how to call 9-1-1.
- Assemble a 3-day disaster supplies kit with food, water, plastic sheeting, duct tape, scissors, medical supplies, battery-powered radio and NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, batteries, flashlights, and other items. For more information about assembling a disaster supplies kit, visit www.fema.gov/areyouready/.
- Put important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, social security cards, passports, wills, deeds, financial and insurance records in a fire- and water-safe location or safe deposit box.

Before a Hazardous Materials Incident

- Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) have responsibility to collect information about hazardous materials in the community and make it available to the public.
- The LEPCs also are tasked with developing emergency plans to prepare for and respond to chemical emergencies, the ways the public will be notified and actions the public must take in the event of a release.
- Contact your LEPC to find out more about chemical hazards and what needs to be done to minimize the risk to individuals and the community.
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During a Hazardous Materials Incident

- Listen to local radio and television for information and instructions.
- Follow the instructions carefully.
- Stay away from the area to minimize the risk of contamination.
- Remember that some toxic chemicals are odorless.
- If you are asked to evacuate, do so immediately.

During a Hazardous Materials Incident (Continued)

- If you are outside stay upstream, uphill and upwind. Try to go at least one-half mile (8-10 city blocks) from the danger area. Do not walk into or touch any spilled liquids, airborne mists, or solid chemical deposits.
- If you are in a vehicle in town and slow traffic, 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 on a highway and can move away from the site quickly do not stop.
- If outside on foot, stop and seek shelter in a permanent building.

If you are instructed to stay indoors:

- Go into your 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 and electrical conduits.
- Ten square feet of floor space per person will provide sufficient air to prevent carbon dioxide build-up for up to five hours, assuming a normal breathing rate while resting. However, local officials are unlikely to recommend shelter in a sealed room for more than 2-3 hours because the effectiveness of such sheltering diminishes with time as the contaminated outside air gradually seeps into the shelter.

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 in to contact with or have been exposed to hazardous chemicals. Do the following:
 - Follow decontamination instructions from local authorities. Depending on the chemistry of the hazardous material, you may be instructed to take a thorough shower, or you may be warned 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. Call local authorities to find out about proper disposal.
 - Advise everyone who comes in contact with you that you may have been exposed to a toxic substance.
- Find out from local authorities how to clean up your land and buildings if necessary.
- Report any lingering vapors or other hazards to your local emergency services office.

The Recovery Process

- For direct assistance to individuals and families for immediate needs contact the American Red Cross or other local voluntary agencies.
- Check newspapers, television, or radio news for information on assistance available.
- If you have property damage, contact your insurance company as soon as possible. If a major disaster has been declared also contact the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center at 1-800-621-3362.
- For information on helping children deal with disaster, visit www.fema.gov or get a copy of FEMA 478 **Helping Children Cope with Disaster**. To obtain other fact sheets and publications call the FEMA Distribution Center at 1-800-480-2520.

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Dangerous Hazardous Materials Myth!	The Facts:
Once empty, containers that once held hazardous materials are no longer harmful or subject to Federal, State or local disposal regulations.	That depends on the physical state and degree of hazard of the material that was once in the container. Federal, State and local requirements strictly regulate the disposal of these containers to protect the public and the environment from possible harm.