

# What are YOU gonna do about...

## HAZARDOUS MATERIALS?

Chemical plants are one source of hazardous materials, but there are many others that exist in large industry, small businesses, and homes. There are about 500,000 products that could pose a physical or health hazard -- things ranging from waste produced by a petroleum refinery to materials used by the dry cleaners to pesticides stored in your home.

Most hazardous materials are transported around the country by road, rail and through pipelines potentially causing spills on highways, near railroad tracks or underground. Many U.S. communities have a **Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)** that keeps local planners, companies and members of the community informed of potential risks. All companies that have hazardous chemicals must report to the LEPC every year and the public is encouraged to get involved. We [the public] should all learn more about hazardous materials and how they can affect our lives so contact your emergency management office to learn more.

We're going to cover two topics here -- **HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DISASTER** (where a spill or incident affects an area or community) and **HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL EMERGENCIES** (how to handle products and react if there's an emergency in the home). Also, please review the **TERRORISM** topic since it covers several chemical and biological agents that are also classed as "hazardous materials".

### BEFORE A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DISASTER:

Learn the buzzwords - Ask your local officials about emergency warning procedures and terms...

- **Outdoor warning sirens or horns** - ask what they mean and what to listen for
- **Emergency Alert System (EAS)** - information and alerts via TV and radio
- **"All-call" telephoning** - an automated system for sending recorded messages via telephone
- **Residential route alerting** - messages announced from vehicles equipped with public address systems (loud speakers on top of car or van)

Learn risks - Ask Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), Emergency Management Office, or Fire Department about community plans for responding to a hazardous materials accident at a plant or a

transportation accident involving hazardous materials. Ask about the Emergency Planning and Community Right To Know Act (or EPCRA) and help your community become better informed.

Make a plan - Use LEPC's or agency's information to determine if your family is at risk (especially people living close to freeways, railroads, or factories which produce or transport toxic waste). And review Section 1 to develop a **Family Emergency Plan** and **Disaster Supplies Kit**.

Take a tour - LEPCs sometimes visit facilities that produce or transport toxic waste and include community groups, local officials and the media.

Pick a room - It could take authorities time to determine what the hazardous material is (if any) so pick a room in advance that your family could use as "shelter-in-place" if told to stay indoors for several hours. It's best to pick an internal room where you could block out air, if instructed to do so. To save critical time consider measuring and cutting plastic sheets in advance for each opening (vents, windows, and doors). Remember, toilets / drains are vented meaning outside air comes in constantly or when flushed / open (depends on design) - in case using bathroom as safe room.

Calculate air for room - Keep in mind people can stay in a sealed off room for only so long (or you'll run out of air.) FEMA suggests 10 square feet of floor space per person (like 5ft x 2ft / 1.5m x 0.6m ) will provide enough air to prevent carbon dioxide buildup for up to 5 hours.

Be ready to evacuate - Listen to local authorities and leave if you are told to evacuate. (*see EVACUATION*)

## **DURING A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DISASTER:**

Call for help - If you see a hazardous materials accident, call 9-1-1, local emergency number, or the fire department.

Listen - Keep radio or TV tuned in for more information, especially if you hear a warning signal... and stay calm!

**IF INDOORS** – If instructed to stay inside, prepare to “shelter-in-place”...

- Close windows, vents, and fireplace dampers and turn off A/C or heat and fans to reduce air drawn in from outside.
- Keep a radio with you at all times.
- Grab **Disaster Supplies Kit** and get to a closed off room.
- Seal gaps under doorways and windows with wet towels or plastic and duct tape (see above tips on picking a room and calculating air!)

**IF OUTDOORS** - Stay upstream, uphill, or upwind from the disaster since hazardous materials can be carried by wind and water quickly. Try to get at least 1/2 mile or kilometer away or as far away as possible!

**IF IN A VEHICLE** - Close your windows and shut off vents to reduce risk.

Stay away - Get away from the accident site to avoid contamination.

Evacuate...? - If told to leave... DO it! If officials say you have time, close windows, shut vents and turn off attic fans. (*see EVACUATION*)

What to wear - Keep your body fully covered and wear gloves, socks and shoes. (Even though these may not keep you totally safe, it can help.)

Things to avoid:

- **chemicals** - spilled liquid materials or airborne mists
- **contaminated food or water** - don't eat or drink food or water that may have been exposed to hazardous materials

## **AFTER A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DISASTER:**

Don't go there - Do not return home until local authorities say it is safe.

Air out - Open windows, vents and turn on fans in your home.

Listen - Keep up with local reports from either the radio or TV.

Clean up - A person, critter or item that has been exposed to a hazardous chemical could spread it.

- **decontamination** - follow instructions from local authorities since it depends on the chemical. May need to rinse off or may be told to stay away from water - check first!
- **strange symptoms** - if unusual symptoms show up, get to a hospital or medical expert right away. Remove contaminated clothing and put on fresh, loose, warm clothing and listen to local reports on the radio.
- **store clothes & shoes** - put exposed clothing and shoes in tightly sealed containers/bags without touching other materials and ask local authorities how to get rid of them
- **tell people you've been exposed** - tell everyone who comes in contact with you that you may have been exposed to a toxic substance
- **land and property** - ask authorities how to clean area

Strange vapors or danger - Report any strange vapors or other dangers to the local authorities immediately.

To learn more about hazardous materials, check out the Programs under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Emergency Management at [www.epa.gov/emergencies](http://www.epa.gov/emergencies) ... or visit the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Hazardous Materials Safety at <http://hazmat.dot.gov/>

Or visit Environment Canada at [www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca) ... or the Canadian Transport Emergency Centre of the Department of Transport at [www.tc.gc.ca/canutec/](http://www.tc.gc.ca/canutec/)

## **BEFORE A HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL EMERGENCY:**

Learn risks - Call your local public health department or the Environmental Protection Agency for information about hazardous household materials. And check out the National Library of Medicine's Household Products Database that provides information on over 8,000 common household products and their potential health effects at <http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/>

Read labels - Always read product labels for proper use, safe storage and disposal of chemicals.

Recycle it? - Call your local recycling center or collection site to ask what chemicals can be recycled or dropped off for disposal -- many centers take things like car batteries, oil, tires, paint or thinners, etc.

Store it - Keep all chemicals and household cleaners in safe, secure locations out of reach of small children.

Put it out - Don't smoke while using household chemicals.

## **DURING A HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL EMERGENCY:**

Call for help - Call your local Poison Control Center, 9-1-1, fire department, hospital or emergency medical services. If possible, have container handy since medical professionals may need specific data from label.

First aid tips - Follow instructions on label and see Basic First Aid tips for POISONING in Section 3.