

Chemical Emergencies

Chemicals Are an Important Part of Life

Chemicals are a natural and important part of our environment. Even though we often don't think about it, we use chemicals every day. Chemicals help keep our food fresh and our bodies clean. They help our plants grow and fuel our cars. And chemicals make it possible for us to live longer, healthier lives.

Under certain conditions, chemicals can be poisonous or have a harmful effect on your health. Some chemicals, which are safe, and even helpful in small amounts, can be harmful in larger quantities or under certain conditions.

Chemical accidents do happen . . . at home and in the community, and the American Red Cross wants you to be prepared.

Major Chemical Emergencies

A major chemical emergency is an accident that releases a hazardous amount of a chemical into the environment. Accidents can happen underground, on railroad tracks or highways, and at manufacturing plants. These accidents sometimes result in a fire or explosion, but many times you cannot see or smell anything unusual.

How You May Be Notified of a Major Chemical Emergency

In the event of a major chemical emergency, you will be notified by the authorities. To get your attention, a siren could sound, you may be called by telephone, or emergency personnel may drive by and give instructions over a loudspeaker. Officials could even come to your door.

Listen carefully to radio or television emergency alert stations (EAS), and strictly follow instructions. Your life could depend on it.

You Will Be Told:

- The type of health hazard
- The area affected
- How to protect yourself
- Evacuation routes (if necessary)
- Shelter locations
- Type and location of medical facilities
- And the phone numbers to call if you need extra help.

Do not call the telephone company, and do not call EMS, 9-1-1, or the operator for information. Dial these numbers only for a possible life-threatening emergency.

Shelter in Place

One of the basic instructions you may be given in a chemical emergency is to "shelter in place". This is a precaution aimed to keep you and your family safe while remaining in your home. If you are told to shelter in place, take your children and pets indoors immediately.

While gathering your family, you can provide a minimal amount of protection to your breathing by covering your mouth and nose with a damp cloth.

Close all windows in your home.

Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems

Close the fireplace damper

Go to an above-ground room (not the basement) with the fewest windows and doors.

Take your Family Disaster Supplies Kit with you.

Wet some towels and jam them in the crack under the doors.

Tape around doors, windows, exhaust fans or vents. Use the plastic garbage bags to cover windows, outlets, and heat registers.

If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds, or curtains. To avoid injury, stay away from the windows.

Stay in the room and listen to your radio until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate.

Evacuation

Authorities may decide to evacuate an area for your protection. Again, it is important to stay calm, listen carefully and follow all instructions.

If you are told to evacuate, listen to your radio to make sure the evacuation order applies to you and to understand if you are to evacuate immediately or if you have time to pack some essentials. Do not use your telephone.

If you are told to evacuate immediately:

- Take your Family Disaster Supplies Kit and medications
- Close and lock your windows
- Shut off all vents

- Lock the door
- Move quickly and calmly

If the authorities tell you to evacuate because of a possible chemical emergency, take your Family Disaster Supplies Kit

A change of clothing for each member of the family

Medication, eyeglasses, hearing aids or dentures, or things like canes and walkers

Personal items such as toothbrushes, deodorant, etc.

Items for your baby such as diapers, formula, or baby food

Books, puzzles or cards and games for entertainment.

Do not assume that a shelter will have everything you need. In most cases, the shelters will provide only emergency items such as meals, cots, and blankets.

You don't need to turn off your refrigerator or freezer, but you should turn off all other appliances and lights before locking your home as you leave.

Check on neighbors to make sure they have been notified, and offer help to those with disabilities or other special needs. If you need a ride, ask a neighbor. If no neighbor is available to help you, listen to the emergency broadcast station for further instructions.

Take only one car to the evacuation site.

Close your car windows and air vents and turn off the heater or air conditioner.

Don't take shortcuts because a shortcut may put you in the path of danger. For your safety, follow the exact route you are told to take.

Emergency Procedures for School Children

In an emergency, your children may be sheltered in place or evacuated from school. If protective actions are being taken at your children's school, do not go to the school. School personnel are trained to handle emergencies.

Do not call your child's school. You could tie up a phone line that is needed for emergency communications.

For further information, listen to local emergency radio and TV stations to learn when and where you can pick up your children.

Who Helps in a Chemical Emergency

There are many organizations that help the community in an emergency, such as police, fire, and sheriff departments, the American Red Cross, and government agencies. All these groups coordinate their activities through the local office of

emergency management. In many areas there are local Hazardous Materials, or Haz-Mat Teams, who are trained to respond to chemical accidents. In the event of a chemical emergency, it is very important that you follow the instructions of these highly trained professionals. They know best how to protect you and your family

Important Points To Remember

1. Chemicals are everywhere. They are an important part of life.
2. The most common chemical accidents occur in our own homes and can be prevented.
3. The best ways to avoid chemical accidents are to read and follow the directions for use, storage, and disposal of the product.
4. Don't mix products, especially household cleaning products.
5. Develop a Family Disaster Plan and pack a Family Disaster Supplies Kit.
6. In the event of an emergency, follow the instructions of the authorities carefully. Listen to your emergency broadcast stations on radio and TV.
7. Use your phone only in life-threatening emergencies, and then call the Poison Control Center, EMS, 9-1-1, or the operator immediately.
8. If you are told to "shelter in place", go inside, close all windows and vents and turn off all fans, heating or cooling systems. Take family members and pets to a safe room, seal windows and doors, and listen to emergency broadcast stations for instructions.
9. If you are told to evacuate immediately, take your Family Disaster Supplies Kit. Pack only the bare essentials, such as medications, and leave your home quickly. Follow the traffic route authorities recommend. Don't take short cuts on the way to the shelter.
10. And lastly, remember, the best way to protect yourself and your family is to be prepared.

The American Red Cross is an organization managed by volunteers from your community. Although it receives no money from the government, it is chartered by the U.S. Congress to provide disaster relief. All help given to people during a chemical, house fire, storm, or other emergency is free of charge and supported through charitable contributions and the United Way.

Emergency help may include shelter, meals, replacement of essential medication, and personal hygiene supplies. The Red Cross may also help reunite families by staying in touch with all evacuation sites.