



“Helping to maintain a healthy community”

Health
District

CHEMICAL EMERGENCIES FACT SHEET

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 we want you to be prepared.

How You May Be Exposed to a Chemical

You may be exposed to a chemical in three ways:

1. Breathing the chemical
2. Swallowing contaminated food, water, or medication
3. Touching the chemical, or being exposed to clothing or things that have touched the chemical.

Remember, you may be exposed to chemicals even though you may not be able to see or smell anything unusual.

Chemical Accidents Can Be Prevented

Many people think of chemicals as only those substances used in manufacturing processes. However, chemicals are found everywhere--in our kitchens, medicine cabinets, basements, and garages. In fact, most chemical accidents occur in our own homes. They can be prevented.

Children and Poisoning

The most common home chemical emergencies involve small children eating medicines. Experts in the field of chemical manufacturing suggest taking hazardous materials out of sight could eliminate up to 75 percent of all poisoning of small children.

Keep all medicines, cosmetics, cleaning products, and other household chemicals out of sight and out of reach of children. If your child should eat or drink a non-food substance, find any containers immediately and take them to the phone. Call the Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222) or Emergency Medical Services (EMS), or 9-1-1, if you have it in your area, or call the operator giving this information.

Follow their instructions carefully. Often the first aid advice found on containers may not be appropriate. So, do not give anything by mouth until you have been advised by medical professionals.

Home Product Precautions

Other home accidents can result from trying to improve the way a product works by adding one substance to another, not following directions for use of a product, or by improper storage or disposal of a chemical.

The first precaution you can take is to avoid mixing common household chemical products. Some combinations of these products, such as ammonia and bleach, can create toxic gases.

A second important precaution is to read the directions before using new products. Some products should not be used in a small confined space to avoid inhaling dangerous vapors. Other products should not be used without gloves and eye protection to help prevent the chemical from touching your body. Read and follow the directions.

Another effective way to protect yourself and your family is to store chemical products properly. Non-food products should be stored tightly closed in their original containers so you can always identify the contents and how to use the product.

Never smoke while using household chemicals. Don't use hair spray, cleaning solutions, paint products, or pesticides near the open flame of an appliance, pilot light, lighted candle, fireplace, wood burning stove, etc. Although you may not be able to see or smell them, vapor particles in the air could catch fire or explode.

If you should spill a chemical, clean it up immediately with some rags, being careful to protect your eyes and skin. Allow the fumes in the rags to evaporate outdoors in a safe place, then dispose of them by wrapping them in a newspaper and then placing them in a sealed plastic bag. Dispose of these materials with your trash. If you don't already have one, buy a fire extinguisher that is labeled for A, B, and C class fires and keep it handy.

Buy only as much of a chemical as you think you will use. If you have product left over, try to give it to someone who will use it. Take care to dispose of it properly. Improper disposal can result in harm to yourself or members of your family, accidentally contaminate our local water supply, or harm other people.

It is also important to dispose of products properly to preserve our environment and protect wildlife. Plus, some products can be recycled and further protect our environment.

Many household chemicals can be taken to your local household hazardous waste collection facility. Many facilities accept pesticides, fertilizers, household cleaners, oil-based paints, drain and pool cleaners, antifreeze, and brake fluid. If you have questions about how to dispose of a chemical, call the facility or the environmental or recycling agency to learn the proper method of disposal.