

“HAZARDOUS MATERIALS and WASTE”

Sometimes, people think of chemicals as being only liquids and in containers. This however is far from being true. Chemicals come in all physical forms such as liquids, solids, gases, vapors, fumes and mist.

Chemicals are so much a part of our daily lives and the environment that we tend to forget that they can be harmful or even deadly, Chemicals have, simply putting it, become a part of our every day life. We use them to clean our homes, offices, automobiles, and don't forget the pesticides and fertilizers we use in our yards.

Since hazardous materials and hazardous waste have become more commonplace, accumulating in our homes, the earth, our water, in the air and moving up and down our highways and city streets, it is vitally important that we become more familiar with the challenges that are posed by these substances. When was the last time you actually set down and read the warnings label on a bottle of Clorox, or that bottle or bag of pesticide or fertilizer, how about that can of air freshener and then followed those warnings directions 100 percent? I'm not sure I ever have 100 percent until I started writing this training program, and now, I have read every bottle, bag, box, and can label around this place.

As Amateur Radio emergency communications professionals, we need to be aware of how to recognize and report a possible problem concerning hazardous chemicals and waste, also at the same time how we can safely protect ourselves, our families, neighbors, friends and others. Our ability to detect a hazardous chemical or waste incident and to take the necessary corrective actions could save lives.

Sometimes there may be sensory clues that indicate the presence of a hazardous material; however, these clues are the least dependable and potentially the most dangerous method of identification. If you notice that an area has a terrible smell, or your eyes become watery, your skin becomes irritated or you begin to cough and feel nauseous, leave the area immediately and contact your local police or fire department.

There has been a growing problem over the past few years Nationwide that is potentially deadly, and that is the mid-night dumping by individuals that are producing Methamphetamines. If you should ever be out enjoying nature and come upon some old propane bottles, bottles of liquids, jugs with tubes in them, empty drain opener containers, empty cans of Coleman fuel, empty alcohol bottles, starter fluid cans, funnels, old coffee filters and empty cold pill boxes; **DO NOT TOUCH OR APPROACH TO CLOSELY**, the vapors of and the residues from these items can be deadly. I called one of the Drug Task Force offices and they said that there was about 100 of these illegal dump sites located in the past year and that there may be that many more that hasn't been located. Chemicals being released and/or dumped into our environment, both intentionally and accidentally by individuals and industries are a major concern and challenge facing our Country today. From industrial chemical and toxic waste to household detergents and air fresheners, a potential risk to life, health and property exist every day.

Some potential sources of hazardous materials and waste may be closer to your home than you think:

1. Your local service stations and auto repair shops which store and dispense gasoline, diesel fuel, oil and other automotive chemicals, plus the solvents they use can and have been lethal in the past.
2. Hospitals store a range of radio-active materials, flammables and a whole host of Bio-hazards.
3. There are approximately 30,000 hazardous waste sites in the United States. In 2004, Arkansas had 11 hazardous/toxic waste sites on the National Priority Clean-up List due to their severity or close proximity to the public. There are also approximately 50 other hazardous waste sites in the state and these do not include industrial sites around the state.
4. And of course, there are the transport vehicles such as big trucks, vans, cars, pick-up trucks, trains, buses, ships and barges and the aircraft that haul hazardous materials around and over us every day of the year.

Amateur radio operators may encounter hazardous materials incidents in their travels, or they may be ask to assist with emergency communications during an incident. Therefore, proper training is required to ensure your safety. Moreover, a

wrong move by you during a Haz-Mat operation can endanger not only your safety but also the safety of other responders as well as the entire community. I think it would be safe to say that everyone has seen the Diamond shaped placards on the sides and backs of the big transport trucks, railcars, stationary tanks and facilities. These placards tell us the story about what type of chemical, their hazards and other information on the product that is being hauled or stored.

The following information is offered as guidelines for handling haz-mat incidents should you ever come upon one of them: Once you are in a safe location, at least 1000 to 1500 feet away, uphill and or upwind from the incident, try to identify the materials involved. DO NOT attempt to get just a little closer so you can read the placards or other information easier. Look for the four digit number on the placard or an orange colored panel, and any other information you can see from your safe location. Then call for help immediately and let the experts handle the situation. Remember, even ordinary Policemen and Fire Fighters are prohibited by federal law from taking certain actions at some ha-mat incidents. Do not personally take any action beyond your report and preventing others from approaching the incident area.

When reporting a haz-mat incident, you should give the following information:

1. Identify yourself.
2. Give you location and the location of the incident in detail.
3. Briefly descried what you see such as liquid spill, gaseous clouds and the placard information.
4. If a gaseous cloud or liquid spill does exist, give the direction that the contaminate is flowing or moving. Give any pertinent weather or other information you can observe from your safe location that may help the experts in responding to the incident.

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01-21-06