Shelter-in-Place

We live in an industrial world today. We make, move and use products created from chemicals that can be hazardous. As a result, there is a possibility that a hazardous chemical could be released into the atmosphere during a train derailment, a roadway crash, or a manufacturing accident. A hazardous chemical could be solid, liquid, or gas. You may not be able to see or smell the chemical, which can be quite dangerous.

You should take action if you notice any of the following:

- An unusual smell or sound, such as an explosion
- Visible smoke, fire or a vapor cloud
- Skin or eye irritation
- Breathing difficulty

In some instances, you may not have time to evacuate from an affected area. Evacuations routes may become either disrupted or congested and evacuation may not be an option. In such cases, you may be advised to Shelter-in-Place.

How To Shelter in Place

If a hazardous chemical emergency occurs in your neighborhood, the most important thing to remember is to take action quickly. To shelter-in-place you should go inside a room within your home or business and stay put. Select an area that has a telephone, water, toilet, and some place you can seal off easily. A bathroom or bedroom is an excellent choice.

Be Aware and Prepare

Create an emergency plan just like you do in the event of a fire, earthquake, or any other kind of emergency. Include in the plan the steps you will take to protect yourself and your family. Make a checklist of what needs to be done then assign tasks. Each person should have a job for which they are capable of and responsible for.
Add supplies to your 72 Hour emergency kit you may already have. Inside keep an updated emergency phone list that includes the phone numbers for a doctor, closest emergency room, police, and fire agencies. Also note the local TV channels and radio stations with frequent news broadcasts.

Make sure your emergency kit includes the following:

- Two rolls of duct tape
- Scissors
- Towels
- Drinking water
- Toilet supplies and any necessary medications
- Portable battery operated radio
- Flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Your checklist

Store your emergency kit in a place you can get to quickly and easily. Then rehearse by having emergency drills.

**Follow These Steps to Shelter in Place**

When you are aware of a hazardous chemical release and cannot evacuate, these steps will help you shelter in place until the hazards dissipates or you are assisted by emergency responders.

1. Take action immediately and go inside.
2. Shut off air intakes, heaters and air conditioners. You do not want the outside air to be pulled into your house. Additionally, make sure all fireplace dampers are closed.
3. Go to the area you’ve chosen as your Shelter-in-Place. Close all doors, windows, vents, and any other openings to the outside. This may include light switches, outlets, faucets or ceiling fans.
4. Insure that all the openings are sealed air tight with duct tape or wet towels. Most hazards will dissipate within hours and there is not a danger of suffocating inside a normal sized room.

5. If you think chemicals are still leaking into your home, cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth.

6. Tune to your local news radio or TV station to learn more about the emergency. Do not leave unless you are asked to do so.

During any emergency it is important to stay off the phone. Do not tie up regular or cellular phone lines needed by the fire, police, or sheriff departments. Only call 911 if there is an injury or other immediate emergency. Do not call 911 for information updates on the emergency. The best things you can do is stay put and listen to the radio and TV as the spill or release is monitored by local officials.

If an evacuation is necessary, in most cases your local fire department or law enforcement agency will contact you with complete instructions on what to do. When the emergency is over, the fire department will issue an “All Clear”. At that time, you can open windows and doors to let in fresh air and move your family outside.

**What to do if you are not at home?**

If you are not at home and a hazardous chemical emergency should occur, follow the same steps that are appropriate to take Shelter-in-Place. Follow them at your office, a shopping mall or at a school.

Even if you are in your car, just make sure you have all outside vents, windows and doors closed when you Shelter-in-Place in your vehicle. Never attempt to drive through a gas cloud. Turn on your radio to listen to further instructions.

If you are outside when you detect an emergency, cover your nose and mouth with a handkerchief or cloth. Remember that the chemical is moving with the wind. Don’t walk into it or with it. You should move crosswind with the wind at your side. Find shelter as soon as possible. Go inside, stay inside, and follow the Shelter-in-Place procedure.
Whether it’s a fire, earthquake, or hazardous chemical emergency, we all hope these disasters do not happen. Unfortunately, they sometimes do. What is important is that we all be aware and prepared.

For more information on hazardous chemical emergencies, contact Region 22 Emergency Management or the Region 22 Local Emergency Planning Committee, 1801 Avenue B, Scottsbluff, Nebraska 69361, 308-436-6689.