



Environmental News

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EPA RELEASES LIST OF 402 CHEMICALS FOR RESPONSE PLANNING PROGRAM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released to the states additional information and guidance materials in its program to help states and communities respond to emergencies from the release of toxic chemicals into the air.

Included in the new materials is a list of 402 acutely toxic chemicals, which, if released accidentally in sufficient quantities, could produce immediate (acute) adverse health effects to nearby populations unless appropriate emergency response action is taken. The agency also is providing criteria for communities to use to determine the potential danger of chemicals not on the list. A chemical's potential danger may vary with its use, handling, and circumstances of release.

The agency also is releasing guidance for states and local communities to use in determining the presence of the chemicals in their communities, and in developing or improving local emergency response plans in the event of an accidental release of any of those substances.

EPA is asking states and communities to work with local industries and emergency response personnel to determine the locations of these chemicals in the communities, and to assess the adequacy of local emergency response plans.

"Today's actions are designed to start a communication process among citizens, their local and state governments, and local industries. This process should ensure that the communities are fully prepared, or soon will be prepared, to adequately respond to chemical accident emergencies," said EPA Administrator Lee M. Thomas. "EPA and other federal agencies will be working very closely with the states and their communities to help them assess and improve emergency response planning."

EPA will provide technical training to state and local officials to help them identify potential chemical hazards and develop adequate response plans. EPA has been working closely with the states government, state and local associations, public interest and industry groups, and other federal agencies over the the last several months to inform them of the agency's new emergency planning program (called the Chemical Emergency Preparedness Program (CEPP)).

"This unprecedented federal, state and local effort is designed to help prevent tragedies similar to the one last year in Bhopal, India," said Thomas. "EPA is providing technical expertise through the states to communities to ensure that each one of them will be able to take action necessary to protect the public in the event of a chemical emergency.

"The primary responsibility for dealing with emergencies -- chemical or otherwise -- has always rested with local authorities," said Thomas. "This program complements existing state and local emergency preparedness programs."

In its guidance to states and communities, the agency recommends that the chemical identification and response planning process begin with the development of a work group to undertake the effort, led by the local jurisdiction's chief executive (mayor, city manager, county executive or other official). To be effective and representative of the community as a whole, the work group should include local emergency response experts (such as police and fire departments, civil defense agencies, medical community representatives, Red Cross personnel), environmental control agencies, technical experts (such as university or laboratory scientists), citizen groups, local industry officials and workers (or their unions), and other appropriate representatives.

The first step, the determination of locations of acutely toxic chemicals in the community, can be undertaken by the work group through information provided by local industries, local fire department and other public safety agency records, nationwide industrial information directories which describe major production sources of chemicals, and from federal and state agencies. EPA has been working closely with industry and trade groups to ensure that industries will be forthcoming with information concerning chemicals present at their sites; some states have community and/or worker "right-to-know" laws which may be invoked to aid in public access to this information.

Once sources of the chemicals in the community have been determined, the work group should assess the adequacy of the current emergency response program and modify or upgrade response plans as necessary. EPA's guidance provides information on developing and ensuring adequate response plans. At a minimum, an appropriate emergency response plan provides for immediate notification of local response officials of an accidental release, notification of the federal National Response Center (operated by the Coast Guard), information on name, type and quantity of chemical(s) released, notification on whether significant amounts of the chemical appear to be entering the atmosphere, direction of vapor clouds or plumes, and weather conditions, as well as medical emergency information, including immediate action to be taken by the public.

(more)

EPA has emergency personnel available 24 hours a day who can be reached through the National Response Center at 800-424-8802 to help states and localities respond to chemical accidents. In addition, the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), an industry trade group, also provides chemical and emergency response information and support through a separate program called CHEMTREC (800-424-9300).

Other federal agencies involved in the planning process are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which has already established emergency networks in states in the event of emergencies or natural disasters; the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which is responsible for ensuring plant and worker safety; and the Department of Transportation (DOT), which regulates the transportation of hazardous substances.

The agency has provided to the states profiles on each chemical, describing their properties and characteristics.

EPA is seeking public comment on the guidance documents and its list of acutely toxic chemicals. A Federal Register notice will be published in December providing a 90-day public comment period.

The public may receive more information about EPA's Chemical Emergency Preparedness Program by contacting:

EPA/CEPP National Hotline 1-800-535-0202

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