

HOME CHEMICAL EMERGENCIES

A home chemical emergency arises when chemicals are used improperly. Some chemicals that are safe, and even helpful in small amounts, can be harmful in larger quantities or under certain conditions. In fact, most chemical accidents occur in our own homes, and they can be prevented.

Awareness Information

You may be exposed to a chemical even though you may not be able to see or smell anything unusual. You may be exposed in three ways:

- Breathing the chemical
- Swallowing contaminated food, water or medication
- Touching the chemical or coming into contact with clothing or things that have touched the chemical

Preventing Chemical Emergencies in the Home

Learn about household chemical risk. Contact authorities about hazardous household materials, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, for information about potentially dangerous household products and their antidotes. Ask about the advisability of maintaining antidotes in your home for cleaners and germicides, deodorizers, detergents, drain and bowl cleaners, gases, home medications, laundry bleaches, liquid fuels, and paint removers and thinners. Keep all medicines, cosmetics, cleaning products and other household chemicals out of sight and out of reach of children. The most common home chemical emergencies involve small children eating medicines. Experts in the field of chemical manufacturing suggest that moving hazardous materials out of sight could eliminate up to 75 percent of all poisonings of small children.

Bring old prescription medication to the Cudahy Police Department for incineration. Bring prescription drugs in their original containers (remove your name from the bottle) and over the counter medication, ointments, sprays, inhalers, creams and pet medications. The collection program runs Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. at the Cudahy Police Department (5050 South Lake Drive).

Store household chemicals according to the instructions on the label. Non-food products should be stored tightly closed in their original container so you can always identify the contents of each container and how to properly use the product.

Avoid mixing common household chemical products. Some combinations of these products, such as ammonia and chlorine bleach, can create toxic gases.

Always read the directions before using a new product. To avoid inhaling dangerous vapors, do not use some products in a small, confined space. Other products should not be used without gloves and eye protection to help prevent the chemical from touching your body.

Read instructions on how to dispose of chemicals properly. Improper disposal can result in harm to yourself or members of your family, accidental contamination of the local water supply, or harm to other people. It is also important to dispose of products properly to preserve the environment and protect wildlife. Some products can be recycled. If you have questions about how to properly dispose of a chemical, call the facility or the environmental or recycling agency.

- Small amounts of the following products can be safely poured down the drain with plenty of water: antifreeze, bathroom and glass cleaner, bleach, drain cleaner, fertilizer,

household disinfectant, laundry and dishwashing detergent, rubbing alcohol, rug and upholstery cleaner, and toilet bowl cleaner.

- Small amounts of the following products should be disposed of by wrapping the container in newspaper and plastic and placing it in the trash: brake fluid, car wax or polish, dish and laundry soap, drain cleaner, fertilizer, furniture and floor polish, insect repellent, nail polish, oven cleaner, paint thinners and strippers, pesticides, power cleaners, toilet bowl cleaner, water-based paint, and wood preservatives.
- Dispose of the following products at a recycling center or a collection site: kerosene, motor or fuel oil, car battery or battery acid, diesel fuel, transmission fluid, large amounts of paint, paint thinner or stripper, power steering fluid, turpentine, gun cleaning solvents, and tires.
- Empty spray cans by pressing the button until nothing comes out, then place the can in the trash. Do not place spray cans into a burning barrel, incinerator, or trash compactor because they may explode.

Never smoke while using household chemicals. Avoid using 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 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 placing them in a sealed plastic bag. Dispose of these materials with your trash.

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. Storing hazardous chemicals increases the risk of chemical emergencies.

Keep an A-B-C-rated fire extinguisher in the home and car, and get training from your local fire department on how to use them. Should chemicals ignite, you will have an opportunity to extinguish the fire before it spreads, avoiding greater damage.

Post the number of the nearest poison control center by all telephones. In an emergency situation you may not have time to look up critical phone numbers.

Learn to detect the presence of a hazardous material. Many hazardous materials do not have a taste or an odor. Some materials can be detected because they cause physical reactions such as watering eyes or nausea. Some hazardous materials exist beneath the surface of the ground and can be recognized by an oil or foam-like appearance. Recognizing them immediately will allow you to take steps to avoid direct contact and limit your exposure to potentially hazardous chemicals.

Learn to recognize the symptoms of toxic poisoning:

- Difficulty breathing
- Irritation of the eyes, skin, throat or respiratory tract
- Changes in skin color
- Headache or blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Clumsiness or lack of coordination
- Cramps or diarrhea

What to Do During a Home Chemical Emergency

If your child should eat or drink a non-food substance, find any containers immediately and take them to the phone. The poison control center may need specific information from the container to give you the best emergency advice.

Call the poison control center, emergency medical services (EMS), 9-1-1, or the operator. They will give you emergency advice while you wait for professional help.

Follow the emergency operator's or dispatcher's instructions carefully. Often the first aid advice found on containers may not be appropriate. Do not give anything by mouth until you have been advised by medical professionals.

If a hazardous substance comes into contact with an eye, it is important to take immediate action. Delaying first aid can greatly increase the likelihood of injury. Flush the eye with clear, lukewarm water for a minimum of 15 minutes, unless authorities instruct you not to use water on the particular chemical involved. Continue the cleansing process even if the victim indicates he or she is no longer feeling any pain, then seek medical attention.

If there is danger of a fire or explosion, get out of the house immediately. Do not waste time collecting items or calling the fire department when you are in danger.

If there is a fire or explosion, call the fire department from outside (a cellular phone or a neighbor's phone). Once you are safely away from danger, call for professional help. Stay away from the house to avoid the possibility of breathing toxic fumes.

Wash hands, arms, or other parts of the body that may have been exposed to the chemical. Chemicals may continue to irritate the skin until they are washed off. Discard any clothing that may have been contaminated. Some chemicals may not wash out completely. Discarding clothes will prevent potential future exposure.

Administer first aid treatment to victims of chemical burns.

- * Call 9-1-1 for emergency help.
- * Remove clothing and jewelry from around the injury.
- * Pour clean, cool water over the burn for 15 to 30 minutes.
- * Loosely cover the burn with a sterile or clean dressing. Be sure that the dressing will not stick to the burn.
- * Refer victim to a medical professional for further treatment.