

ESP FOCUS

Chemical Threats



Terrorists may use various weapons to threaten or harm people. Some weapons, like localized bombings, can injure small numbers of people but gain lots of publicity. Other types of weapons can harm large numbers of people over a longer time frame. These are sometimes called

Weapons of Mass Destruction or WMD for short. These weapons can be chemical, biological, or radiological.

A chemical attack is the deliberate release of poisonous vapors, aerosols, liquids or solids that have toxic effect on people, animals, birds or plants. These substances are called chemical agents. They can be released into the air by bombs or aircraft, or they can be introduced into the environment in liquid form.

We should also remember that many dangerous chemicals are also in widespread use in industry and even in the home. Motor oil, paint, pool chemicals, household cleaning products, antifreeze, and nail polish remover are just a few of the common household products that are corrosive, flammable, or poisonous.

Unlike biological agents, which can take days or weeks to show their effects, chemical agents can act much faster. Signs of a hazardous chemical release—whether accidental or an act of terrorism—may include sick or dead birds, small animals or fish, or many people in an area suffering from watery eyes, blurred vision, nausea, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing or losing coordination.

TAKE ACTION

Check out the other side of this sheet for practical, affordable and useful things you can do for yourself, your family, your neighborhood and your co-workers. These simple steps may help you balance protection with peace of mind.

LEARN MORE

Knowledge is power. The more you know about chemical threats, the better you can protect yourself and your family.

CHECK THESE WEBSITES

- www.bt.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- www.fema.gov (Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- www.redcross.org (American Red Cross)
- www.hhs.gov (Department of Health and Human Services)
- www.ci.riverside.ca.us/fire (City of Riverside Fire Department)



J U L Y

www.espfocus.org

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Assemble and maintain an emergency supply kit.
- Be alert to your surroundings. When you are in a public place, pay attention to the location of exits, telephones, and security officers.
- Know how to find news radio stations in your area, and make it a practice to listen for a few minutes whenever you begin a trip by car.

IN CASE OF AN ATTACK

If you see signs of a chemical attack:

- Try to define the affected area and where the chemical is coming from, if you can.
- Move away from the affected area.
 - Uphill: Chemical agents tend to settle toward the ground and surfaces
 - Upwind: If the agent is blowing, move out of its path
 - Upstream: If the agent is flowing, move away from the direction of flow
- Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air, but still allow you to breathe.

If the chemical is inside your building:

- Try to get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area, if possible.
- If that isn't possible, it may be better to move as far away from where you suspect the chemical has been released, and isolate yourself from the chemical's effect (Shelter In Place).

If you are outside when you see signs of a chemical attack:

- Quickly decide the fastest way to get away from the chemical threat.
- Consider if you can get out of the area, or if it would be better to go inside a building and follow your plan to shelter in place.
- If other people are approaching, warn them of the danger and direct them away from the source of the chemical agent.
- If your eyes are watering, your skin is stinging, you are having trouble breathing, or you have other signs of exposure to a chemical agent, immediately begin steps to decontaminate yourself, and let someone know you need emergency medical attention.

DECONTAMINATION

If you believe you may have been exposed to a chemical, minutes count. If professional medical help is not immediately available, decontaminate yourself and assist in decontaminating others. Here are some tips.

- Remove clothing and other items in contact with the body. Try not to pull contaminated clothing over your face. Put contaminated clothing into a plastic bag and close it tightly. Put personal items that you'll need later (glasses, jewelry, wallet, etc.) in a separate plastic bag. Write your name on the bag, and seal it too.
- Flush eyes with lots of water. (Look for a hose, fountain, or any other source of clean water.)
- Gently wash face, hands and hair with soap and water, then rinse thoroughly. (Don't scrub the chemical into your skin.)
- Change into uncontaminated clothes.
- Seek emergency medical attention.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR PARENTS

If children are exposed to a chemical agent, they too may need to go through the decontamination process. This experience can add to the fear, confusion and insecurity that children may experience during emergencies. Parents can help children cope by offering them reassurance that they are safe, talking with them and listening closely to their feelings, and preventing them from watching repeated news coverage of emergency events. Older children and teenagers may also gain a sense of control over the outcome of the situation by taking part in activities that benefit others in need.



This focus sheet is produced as part of the Emergency Survival Program (ESP). ESP is an awareness campaign designed to increase home, neighborhood, business and school emergency preparedness. ESP was developed by the County of Los Angeles. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and representatives from Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Ventura counties, Southern California Edison, the Southern California Earthquake Center and the American Red Cross assist in the development of campaign materials and coordination of the campaign.