



Introduction – Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials are materials which, because of their chemical, biological or physical nature, pose a potential risk to life, health or property if they are released or misused. These chemicals are used in agriculture, industry, medicine, research and consumer goods.

Hazardous materials are found in industrial plants, hospitals and farms, and they are also found in most homes. Many homes use and store hazardous materials, such as detergents, gasoline, drain openers, bleach, bug spray, lighter fluid and household cleaners.

Accidents with hazardous materials can range from a home accident with bleach to groundwater contamination by a naturally-occurring methane gas, or to a chemical spill on a highway. Radiological accidents are a specialized type of hazardous materials accident, and they will be discussed in Chapter 12.

This chapter provides a general overview of hazardous materials, what to do in the event of a hazardous materials spill or accident, how to do a home hazard hunt and how to handle a hazardous materials accident in the home.

According to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, companies using or storing hazardous materials are required to make detailed information about those materials available to the public at the public's request. Your local emergency planning agency should be able to tell you where reportable quantities of hazardous materials are stored in your area.

In addition to the information in this notebook, you will want to be familiar with local warning and notification methods. You will also want to find out about your community response plans in the event of a hazardous materials accident in your area.

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