



## What to Do if a Hazardous Materials Accident Occurs



“If you witness a hazardous materials accident, spill or leak, call 911, your local emergency number or the fire department as soon as possible.”

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Adapted by UF/IFAS from:  
*Extension Agent's Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response*  
(Texas Agricultural Extension Services and the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center)

### #1 Notify Authorities

If you witness a hazardous materials accident, spill or leak, call 911, your local emergency number or the fire department as soon as possible.

### #2 Leave the Accident Area

- Stay away from the incident site to minimize your chances of contamination.
- If you are caught outside during an incident try to stay upstream, uphill and upwind. Hazardous materials can be transported quickly by water and wind.
- In general, try to go at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile (10 city blocks) from the accident area.
- If you are in a vehicle, close off ventilation and close the windows to reduce contamination or inhalation of the hazardous material.
- If you are told to evacuate, do so immediately.
- Before leaving your home or office, close all windows, shut vents and turn off attic fans to minimize contamination.

### #3 If You Are Asked to Remain at Home

In some circumstances, it is safer to keep community residents inside. This is known as "in-place sheltering." If you are instructed to stay inside:

- Follow all instructions carefully.
- Seal entry routes as efficiently as possible. Close windows and doors and seal drafty places with wet towels, blankets or duct tape.
- Turn off furnaces, air conditioners, vents and fans to keep fumes from entering the house.
- If dangerous fumes do enter the home, take shallow breaths through a cloth or towel.
- Quickly fill up your bathtub with a supply of uncontaminated

- water and turn off the intake valve to your home.
- Stay in protected areas of the house (bathroom, stairwell, basement) where toxic vapors are less likely to penetrate.
  - Close all fireplace dampers.
  - Seal any gaps around window air conditioning units, bathroom and kitchen exhaust fan grilles and stove and dryer vents with tape and plastic sheeting, wax paper or aluminum wrap.
  - If local authorities warn of an outdoor explosion, close all drapes, curtains and shades. Stay away from windows to prevent injury from breaking glass.
  - Avoid contact with any spilled liquid materials, airborne mist or condensed solid chemical deposit.
  - Keep your body fully covered and wear gloves, socks and shoes, even though these measures may offer minimal protection.
  - Avoid eating or drinking any food or water that may be contaminated.