

Cleaning up: take care of chemical spills

Have you created emergency response and spill cleanup plans based on the chemicals you use in your business? This may be a good time to make sure all employees are familiar with the plans, know where to find the spill kit, and are trained on what to do in the case of a spill.

You need to be aware that there are two types of spills—incidental and emergency—which require different responses. The properties of the substance, the circumstances of the release, and mitigating factors in the work area will help you determine the difference.

Incidental spills

An incidental spill does not pose a significant hazard to employees in the immediate vicinity or to the employee cleaning up the spill. It may be safely cleaned up by employees trained on the hazards of the spilled chemical. Incidental releases are limited in quantity, exposure potential, or toxicity.

Emergency spills

Emergency spills exceed the scope of an incidental spill and may present a fire or explosion hazard and are a threat to the health or safety of employees. Because of the additional risk posed by an emergency release, anyone engaged in the response, cleanup, and control of an emergency spill must receive high-level, specialized training covered under OSHA's Hazardous Waste Operations and

Emergency Response standard to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary.

Take action once you have identified whether you are dealing with an emergency spill or an incidental spill.

In the case of an emergency spill, activate alarms and notify response teams in accordance with a pre-arranged plan. Responders can be a highly trained internal team, a contractor, or local fire and rescue departments. If there is a serious safety or fire hazard, call 911. Be prepared to tell the response personnel what chemical and how much has been spilled.

If it is an incidental spill, do the following:

- Identify the chemical involved and notify others by using established in-house procedures and planning.
- If it is safe to begin cleanup, protect yourself against contamination by putting on personal protective equipment, work upwind of the spilled material, and do not smoke, drink, or eat while working in the cleanup area.
- If possible, eliminate the source of the spill: set the container upright, close a leaking valve or hose, or put a secondary container in place to catch the leaking solution.

- Retrieve the spill cleanup kit or gather items necessary to contain and clean the spill. This may include neutralizers, absorbent socks or pillows to place around the spill, brushes or scoops, and heavy polyethylene bags or sealable containers to hold the materials.
- Be sure to arrange for proper disposal of the waste and follow proper decontamination procedures.

Safety Quiz

When do you need to report a hazardous spill to the Oregon Emergency Response System (OERS)?

- A. When any amount of oil spills into waters of the state.
- B. When oil in excess of 42 gallons spills on land.
- C. When there is a spill of hazardous materials equal to or greater than the amount specified in the Federal List of Hazardous Substances and Reportable Quantities.
- D. All of the above

ANSWER TO QUESTION

D. All of the above. Each of these spills is required to be reported immediately to the Oregon Emergency Response System (OERS) at 800.452.0311.