

Staying Safe at the Hazmat Deployment

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Call sign: KE6FF

Hazardous materials are everywhere. When a hazardous material is subjected to a condition for which it was not designed, a hazardous materials incident exists and people and or the environment are at some level of risk. Hazardous materials incidents can exist in the forms of solid, liquid, gas, or radiation. You cannot see or smell radiation. But radiation is hazardous and can easily kill us. There are highly toxic gases that are invisible and odorless which if released and inhaled, can kill us. Some hazardous materials are toxic and can be absorbed through the skin whether it be solid, liquid, or gas.

The first thing to do in a hazardous materials incident is to get people as far away from the hazardous materials scene as possible. Generally, uphill and upwind is preferable. You want the wind blowing the hazardous vapors or smoke away from you. If you are looking at the hazardous materials incident, the wind should be hitting your back and blowing towards the hazardous material scene. Keep people and animals away from the hazardous materials scene, as far away as possible. Emergency responders will arrive, identify the material, and implement predetermined evacuation zones based on conditions present.

If you have been contaminated by the hazardous material, you will likely be stripped down and decontaminated right there. You would then be given a paper or plastic gown to wear before being sent to the hospital to be treated. Unless you like to be stripped naked and decontaminated by a fire hose (the water is not warm), it is best to stay well away, up hill and up wind of the hazardous material scene.

Hazardous materials incidents must be dealt with by specially trained emergency responders. Stay far back and let the professionals do what they are trained to do. Hazardous materials have a universal marking system. This marking system may be seen on hazardous materials packaging. You have likely seen these hazardous materials placards on semi tractor trailers, cars, and trains.



If you see a placard like these on a package or truck, car, or railcar, there is hazardous material inside. You may also see a placard like this one:



You have likely seen a placard like this on the sides and back of a semi tractor tanker truck. The number 1203 is the UN placard number indicating the material being transported is gasoline. The vehicle with a placard on it may look like the ones above and not have a number such as 1203 in the center. Notice that the placards above do not have a number in the center, but have a single number in the lowest corner of the placard. The single number in the lowest corner of the placard also tells emergency responders something about the material being transported.

Hazardous materials are also stored in buildings. There is a marking system for buildings that have hazardous materials inside. While a building SHOULD have the marking on the outside indicating a hazardous material inside, DO NOT assume that it always will.



Above is a placard you will find on many buildings that contain hazardous materials. The numbers are from 0 through 4. The number 4 indicates the highest hazard level. The blue section relates to health hazard. The red section relates to fire hazard. The yellow section relates to reactivity. The white section is for special information. The white section above indicates a hazardous material is present for which water should not be used. While a building with hazardous materials SHOULD have one of these placards on it, DO NOT assume it always will. If you see one of these placards, assume there is hazardous materials present until proven otherwise.



Here is another hazardous material you might see out there. Can you imagine the panic in the community if you announced over the amateur radio that a biohazard had been released into the community? DO NOT say a hazardous material incident involves a biohazard over amateur radio. We want to be very careful in what we say over amateur radio so as not to cause mass panic in the community. Train with your local emergency responders and find out what they need to hear regarding hazardous materials without causing mass panic in the community. 73