

## Who can I contact?

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*“Reducing injuries and deaths  
from hazardous substances  
emergency events”*



**ATSDR**  
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

## What is ATSDR?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a federal public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR has a mission to prevent exposure and adverse human health effects and diminished quality of life associated with exposure to hazardous substances from waste sites, unplanned releases, and other sources of pollution present in the environment.

## What is HSEES?

The Hazardous Substances Emergency Events Surveillance (HSEES) system was established by ATSDR to collect and analyze information about releases of hazardous substances that need to be cleaned up or neutralized according to federal, state, or local law, as well as threatened releases that result in a public health action such as an evacuation. The goal of HSEES is to reduce the morbidity (injury) and mortality (death) that result from hazardous substances events, which are experienced by first responders, employees, and the general public.

## What states currently participate in HSEES?

Sixteen state health departments currently have cooperative agreements with ATSDR to participate in HSEES: Alabama, Colorado, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.

## What types of events are included in HSEES?

An HSEES event is defined as any release(s) or threatened release(s) of at least one hazardous substance. A substance is considered hazardous if it might reasonably be expected to cause adverse human health effects. Releases of only petroleum products are excluded from this system.

## What data elements are captured in HSEES?

Data are entered by participating state health departments into a web-based application that enables ATSDR to instantly access data for analysis. Data collected include the following:

- Time, date, and day of the week
- Geographical location and place within the facility where the event occurred
- Event type (fixed-facility or transportation-related event)
- Factors contributing to the release Environmental sampling and follow-up health activities
- Specific information on injured persons: age, sex, type and extent of injuries, distance from spill, population group (employee, general public, responder, student), and type of protective equipment used
- Information about decontaminations, orders to evacuate or shelter-in-place
- Land use and population information to estimate the number of persons at home or work who were potentially exposed
- Whether a contingency plan was followed and which plan

## What have the HSEES data shown thus far?

HSEES captures data for more than 5,000 events annually. Over the years the national database has remained fairly consistent, while individual states may vary. Contrary to popular belief, fixed-facility events represent about 80% and transportation-related events about 20% of all reported events. Most events occur on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Events tend to increase in spring and summer when agricultural activities are at a peak.

The most frequent causal factors for fixed-facility events are equipment failure and operator error. Most fixed-facility releases involve a vessel used for processing. Other prime locations for events are piping, material loading and unloading sites, and above ground storage areas. Over 90% of all events reported to HSEES involve the release or threatened release of only one hazardous substance.

Employees, which includes students, is the population group most often injured, followed by the general public and first responders. Respiratory irritation is the most commonly reported injury. Other common injuries are eye irritation, gastrointestinal irritation, vomiting, headache, and dizziness. The majority of all victims are treated at a hospital for their injuries and then released. The vast majority of persons do not wear personal protective equipment (PPE), or they wear PPE that is not protective against chemicals.

## How are HSEES data used?

The HSEES system generates information used by participating states to conduct the following activities:

- Provide presentations of data from HSEES to industries that account for a significant number of spills to help plan prevention strategies
- Provide data for Hazardous Material training courses, including data on the risk of injury from methamphetamine labs
- Provide data to establish and maintain protection areas for municipal water systems
- Provide data by county on spills to assist with the proper placement of Hazardous Material teams and equipment
- Distribute fact sheets on frequently spilled chemicals or chemicals that cause a disproportionate number of injuries, such as chlorine and ammonia
- Distribute newsletters to industry, responder, and environmental groups
- Provide presentations for state and local emergency planners