Managing Hazardous Materials Incidents

Hospital Emergency Departments

A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients

U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services
Public Health Service
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Managing Hazardous Materials Incidents

Volume II
(Revised)

Hospital Emergency Departments:

A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has produced a three-volume series entitled Managing Hazardous Material Incidents. The series is designed to help emergency response and health care professionals plan for and respond to hazardous material emergencies.

Volume I  Emergency Medical Services: A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients

Volume II  Hospital Emergency Departments: A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients

Volume III  Medical Management Guidelines for Acute Chemical Exposures

Volumes I and II are planning guides to assist first responders and hospital emergency department personnel in planning for incidents that involve hazardous materials.

Volume III is a guide for health care professionals who treat persons who have been exposed to hazardous materials.

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Introduction

The presence of hazardous materials or toxic chemicals at an incident location or other emergency situation adds a new dimension of risk to those handling and treating casualties. The fundamental difference between a hazardous materials incident and other emergencies is the potential for acute risk from contamination to both patient and responder. In some cases, traditional practices must be altered to avoid compounding a critical situation.

Hospital emergency departments must protect their personnel and other people within the hospital, while providing the best care for the chemically contaminated patient. This guide is intended to help hospital emergency departments plan for incidents that involve hazardous materials and to improve their ability to respond to these incidents.

To ensure appropriate and timely patient care, as well as optimal worker protection, emergency personnel must understand decontamination procedures and personal protective equipment, neither of which are routinely covered in the course of their professional training. They should also be aware of community resources that could be called upon to assist with an emergency response.

Current training curricula for emergency room physicians and nurses and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) often do not adequately prepare these professionals to manage the contaminated individual or to decontaminate patients exposed to toxic substances. Accurate, specific, and concise guidance is needed to describe appropriate procedures to be followed by emergency medical personnel to safely care for a patient, as well as to protect equipment, hospital personnel, patients, and others from risk of secondary exposure. In response to this need, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) contracted for the production of a three-volume series entitled Managing Hazardous Materials Incidents: I. Emergency Medical Services: A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients; II. Hospital Emergency Departments: A Planning Guide for the Management of Contaminated Patients; and III. Medical Management Guidelines for Acute Chemical Exposures. The first document is designed for use by emergency medical technicians and other prehospital care providers to minimize their risks of exposure during the prehospital period and to provide for the safe and effective treatment of chemically contaminated patients.

This volume, written for emergency department personnel, is designed to familiarize readers with the concepts, terminology, and key operational considerations that affect the management of incidents of chemical contamination. It presents uniform guidance for the emergency care of chemically contaminated patients; provides basic information critical to advance planning and implementation of emergency medical strategies; illustrates the characteristics of hazardous materials incidents that compel modifications to traditional emergency response procedures; and presents effective preparatory response actions.
Not all hospital and community emergency response systems are prepared to respond to a hazardous chemical incident to the same degree. This document may be used to assess a hospital’s capabilities with respect to potential community hazards and to develop response plans using national and community-specific resources. Employee safety and training are also key factors in the effective management of medical emergencies. This document also is intended to provide source material for developing local training and safety protocols.

Section I, **Systems Approach to Planning**, introduces the guidelines for emergency preparedness and hazardous materials and waste programs of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Government and private planning activities are also outlined, including those established under Title III of the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA); the National Response Team; the Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER) program; and the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP). This chapter discusses the need for hazard identification and risk analysis pertaining to hazardous materials located in a community or transported through it.

Section II, **Emergency Department Response to Hazardous Materials Incidents**, outlines general principles for hazard recognition, chemical exposure, and personal protective equipment. In addition, the hazard recognition section presents general guidance for determining whether a given situation constitutes a hazardous materials incident and details various hazardous materials classification systems. This section also provides basic toxicological and chemical terminology that emergency personnel need to understand to effectively conduct patient assessments. It also provides an overview of personal protective equipment, such as respiratory devices and protective clothing.

Section III, **Patient Management**, includes guidelines for emergency department preparation and response to a potential hazardous materials incident. This chapter also discusses patient assessment and decontamination guidelines.

This guidance document is intended to improve the safety of responders as well as of patients. It is not, however, all-encompassing, nor can it be regarded as a substitute for comprehensive instruction and training for hazardous materials incidents. Supplemental material that is vital to successful response to hazardous materials contamination is cited within the document. These materials should be carefully reviewed before preparing any strategic plans or conducting training exercises on this topic. Also, this document generally does not cover issues associated with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), although some of the information presented is pertinent to these situations as well. Other ATSDR documents specifically address WMD concerns.