

Chemical Leaks and Spills

There's much you can do to prevent spills and leaks, but if one occurs, your safety and the safety of others may depend on your quick response.

PREVENTION

- ◆ Inspect containers regularly for leaks, corrosion and worn seals.
- ◆ Make sure containers are labeled with their contents.
- ◆ Handle containers with care, removing only as much of their contents as you need at a time.
- ◆ Keep containers tightly closed.
- ◆ Find out how to dispose of chemicals that you no longer need.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Be familiar with your employer's emergency response plan and evacuation routes and your assigned role in a spill situation.
- ◆ Make sure that the phone number of the emergency coordinator to whom you must report a spill is clearly posted.
- ◆ Read labels and material safety data sheets of the chemicals you use. You should know the potential hazards—fire, explosion, reactivity, toxicity—that are possible in a spill.

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING A CHEMICAL LEAK OR SPILL

- ◆ Report a leak or spill immediately.
- ◆ Be prepared to report what's leaking or spilled, where it is, the size of the spill and the leak's rate of flow.
- ◆ Avoid touching it, walking in it or breathing around it, even if it has no odor.
- ◆ If you're asked to clean up a small spill, follow company policy and MSDS procedures.
- ◆ If a spill response team is cleaning up the spill, evacuate the area, warn others and stay away until you're told it's safe to return.
- ◆ Discuss with your coworkers how the spill could have been prevented and what steps can be taken to prevent spills in the future.

If you're on a spill response team:

- ◆ Wear protective clothing and respirators.
- ◆ In the case of flammables, avoid using tools that spark.
- ◆ Use corrosive-resistant tools with corrosives.
- ◆ Try to stop the leak or spill by securing a valve, closing a pump, plugging a hole in a leaking container or shifting a container to stop the flow. A barrel may be placed under the leak, or the leaking container may be placed in a larger container or bag.
- ◆ Keep the spill from spreading by putting dikes around drains or reactive chemicals.
- ◆ Use absorbent pillows, pads or substances like clay and vermiculite for small spills.
- ◆ A vacuum truck or specially designed squeegee may be used to move larger spills to a chemical drain or to special drums for disposal.
- ◆ Decontaminate or properly dispose of clothing and equipment used in spill cleanup.

