

THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

COURSE OUTLINE

- **The "ER" at the end of HAZWOPER is particularly important because it represents one of the most dangerous HAZMAT situations you can encounter... emergency response.**
 - This is a job that requires a lot of planning.
- **Sirens blare, smoke rises, people scatter... yet somehow, it seems unreal.**
 - This is how hazardous materials emergencies appear to many of us when we see them on television.
 - But no matter how they look on the small screen, it's nothing compared to what a HAZMAT incident is like when it happens at your facility.
- **When you face a chemical emergency, you are dealing with an event that could quickly grow out of control... threatening the entire area, including surrounding communities.**
- **No one ever knows when a crisis will occur.**
 - But that doesn't mean that your company is helpless.
 - You can prepare for emergencies by having a written plan of action... an "Emergency Response Plan."
- **In fact, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) feels that this is so important that they require all employers who deal with hazardous materials to have one of these plans.**
 - An emergency response plan helps emergency responders to prepare for hazardous chemical accidents before they occur.
- **The plan has two primary functions:**
 - It is a reference to be consulted during an incident.
 - It is a training tool for emergency responders.
- **These two functions support the major purpose of the plan, which is to mentally prepare all responders for a crisis before one takes place.**

- **Every chemical crisis is unique, and unexpected.**
 - Even so, these situations often follow certain patterns... and usually have a number of elements in common.
 - An emergency response plan educates workers in how to recognize these patterns and how to react to them effectively.
- **Like the emergencies they document, emergency response plans come in many forms.**
 - The plans vary from facility to facility, depending upon specific needs.
 - Still, all of the plans have the same general contents.
- **For example, every emergency response plan contains information on the "chain of command."**
 - This details who is responsible for the various phases of emergency response.
- **Let's take a look at a typical chain of command.**
 - Not only will it show us who reports to whom, it will give us a glimpse of a lot of the other things that the plan addresses.
- **At the top of the chain of command is the "Incident Commander."**
 - This person is responsible for the entire emergency response operation.
- **The Incident Commander has the ultimate responsibility for bringing the event under control, including the containment and cleanup of the hazardous substance.**
 - Every emergency responder answers to this person.
- **Perhaps the most important job that the Incident Commander performs, however, involves the surrounding community.**
 - For instance, the commander needs to make sure that the community is never cut off from the outside world by the emergency.
 - If a one-way street or tunnel is blocked, the incident commander may have to designate alternative routes if an evacuation is necessary.
- **The commander may need to act as a "rumor-control" officer, as well.**
 - He or she can provide the public with timely, accurate information on the incident to prevent misinformation from causing a panic.

- **To ensure that both internal and external responders will work together smoothly during an incident, the commander also needs a good working relationship with the local fire department.**
- **While the incident commander has the position of greatest power, responsibility, and complexity... without reliable information on the released material, the commander is helpless.**
 - Unless there is a solid understanding of the chemicals involved, the incident site can not even be approached safely.
 - Under these conditions, no cleanup operations would be possible.
- **This is where a "Hazardous Materials Specialist" comes in.**
 - The emergency response plan assigns this person the job of determining what kinds of chemicals are on-site, and how they may be involved in the emergency situation.
- **This HAZMAT Specialist ranks directly below the incident commander in authority. The or she is responsible for:**
 - Finding out what the released substance is.
 - Determining what precautions should be taken when working around it.
- **Hazardous Materials Specialists are chemical experts who must convey what they know to their incident commander in a clear, concise way.**
 - This helps the incident commander make the right decisions.
- **"Hazardous Materials Technicians" are next in the chain of command.**
 - They are in charge of neutralizing or removing the released material.
 - HAZMAT Technicians must wear the PPE that is required by the emergency response plan.
 - They must use methods that are specified by the HAZMAT Specialists to contain and then clean up the substance.
- **The plan also lists the procedures that should be used to make sure that unauthorized people do not enter any contaminated areas.**
 - This is the job of workers on the "First Responder: Operations" level.
 - These people are in charge of sealing off contaminated areas... as well as making sure that any spills are contained by means of pillows or dikes.

- **Last in the chain of command are employees on the "First Responder: Awareness" level.**
 - These people are responsible for notifying management that an incident has taken place.
 - While they are not trained to participate in actually containing or cleaning up a spill, they are often the first people on the scene.
 - It is important that the plan tells them who to report an incident to.
- **Although each link in the chain of command performs functions which require very specific training, everyone in the chain must be able to communicate with each other.**
 - This is essential if the chain is to function effectively.
 - People at all levels play an important part in the emergency response process.
- **For instance, some communications procedures, such as the "buddy system", are directly linked to safety considerations.**
 - Whenever responders need to go into a contaminated area, OSHA requires that at least two workers enter the site at the same time.
 - This way, if one of the workers is overcome, the other can report back to their base via radio for help.
 - The unaffected worker may only try to help the other person if they can do so in absolute safety.
 - The main function that the "buddy" performs is communicating that a problem exists.
- **Other communications issues that are addressed in an emergency response plan include:**
 - Knowing who to call during an emergency.
 - When to sound alarms.
 - Making sure that responders are familiar with evacuation routes.
- **In addition to defining the chain of command and addressing communications procedures, the emergency response plan also outlines what personal protective equipment should be worn during various types of emergencies.**
 - The type of PPE that is necessary generally depends upon the nature and quantity of the chemicals that have been released.

- **Combinations of PPE that are used when dealing with chemical releases are grouped into four levels:**
 - Level A.
 - Level B.
 - Level C.
 - Level D.
- **Level A PPE provides the greatest amount of protection.**
 - It is used in places where the most severe skin, respiratory, and eye hazards are encountered.
 - Typically Level A PPE consists of an air-supplying respirator and a totally-encapsulating chemical-protective suit.
- **Level B PPE is used in places that present fewer skin hazards than Level A environments do... but an equal number of respiratory hazards.**
- **Level C PPE provides respiratory protection through the use of air-purifying respirators (APRs), which filter contaminants out of the air before they can be inhaled.**
- **Level D personal protective equipment provides the least amount of protection.**
 - It shields you from "nuisance contamination," such as materials that might stain your clothes.
 - It is simply a work uniform, and must never be used on any site where respiratory or skin hazards exist.
- **But the use of PPE isn't the only preventative measure that the emergency response plan discusses.**
 - The plan also covers procedures, the actions that you must take during an emergency to stay safe while you bring the situation under control.
 - These are called "safe work practices."
- **Safe work practices typically include:**
 - Sealing off the emergency area to limit access to the spill.
 - Monitoring the release site for airborne impurities.
 - Decontaminating any equipment or personnel that are leaving the contaminated area.

- **The best way to learn about these and other safe work practices is through comprehensive training.**
 - OSHA requires each emergency responder to receive the training specific to his or her chain of command level.
 - Additionally, every responder must go through "refresher" training at least once a year.
- **Training must include practice sessions and drills.**
 - This lets everyone "try out" the procedures set out in the emergency response plan.
 - During this process, emergencies involving a range of chemicals, in a number of different environments, are simulated.
- **As part of the drills, trainers will often change the scenarios unexpectedly... such as introducing a medical emergency.**
 - This is done to keep responders on their toes, and get them to expect the unexpected.
- **In some facilities, HAZMAT training also includes familiarizing workers with the mental challenges they may face when they are working in emergency response situations.**
 - This might address the need to stay focused over an extended period of time, or how to deal with seeing people who have been severely injured.
 - Mental preparedness is often the key to a successful emergency response operation.
 - In fact, many experts say that what goes on in the minds of employees is the most crucial part of responding to an incident.
- **And that's really what an emergency response plan is all about... preparing people to face one of the most unpredictable foes anyone ever confronted... a HAZMAT incident.**

*** * *SUMMARY* * ***

- **Familiarize yourself with your facility's emergency response plan before an incident occurs.**
- **Know where you fit in the chain of command, what your duties will be during an incident, and who you should report to.**
- **Take part in your company's practice sessions and drills.**
- **Always follow the procedures detailed in your facility's emergency response plan:**
 - Use safe work practices.
 - Wear the proper PPE.
 - Be prepared, both physically and mentally, for the job you have to do.
- **An emergency involving hazardous chemicals can be one of the most dangerous situations that you ever encounter. But following your company's safety rules... and knowing your emergency response plan inside and out... will help you make it through these incidents safely!**