



Chemical Spills and Leaks

Do You Know What to Do?

There is much that you can do to prevent a spill or leak, but if one occurs, your safety and that of others depend on your quick and appropriate response.

Prevention

Since the best spill is no spill at all, follow these procedures to lessen the chance of one occurring:

- Inspect containers regularly for leaks, corrosion, worn seals.
- Handle containers with care, removing only as much of their contents as you need at a time. Close containers after using them.
- Find out how to dispose of chemicals you no longer need.

Getting Ready

"Getting ready" for a spill? Yes—unfortunately spills do happen, and there are certain preparations you should make:

- Be familiar with your company's emergency response plan, evacuation routes for your area 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.
- Check labels and MSDSs of chemicals you use. You should know the potential hazards—fire, explosion, reactivity, toxicity—that might be present in a spill.

When a Spill Happens

If a spill occurs, **try** to avoid touching it, walking in it, or breathing it, whether it has an odor or not. *Report a spill or leak immediately.* Be prepared to tell what is leaking or spilled, where it is, the size of the spill or the leak's rate of flow. You may be asked to clean up a small spill, following company policy and MSDS procedures. For larger spills, your response depends on your assigned responsibility. Unless you are on the spill response team, you should evacuate the area according to your assigned route, warn others to leave and stay out of the area until you are told it's safe to return.

Containing the Spill

For all but the smallest spills, the spill response team will step in with procedures and equipment for containing the spill and protecting workers and the environment from exposure to the substance. Team members must wear protective clothing and perhaps respirators. If the spill is flammable, they will avoid using tools that spark. Corrosion-resistant tools must be used with corrosive substances.

The first step is to 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 a bag.

Meanwhile, team members work to keep the spill from spreading, putting dikes around drains or reactive chemicals. Once the spill is under control, workers can use a variety of cleanup methods. Absorbent pillows, pads or substances such as clay and vermiculite absorb small spills. Workers may use a vacuum truck or a specially designed squeegee to move the spill to a chemical drain or to special drums for disposal.

Afterward

Following cleanup of a spill, clothing and equipment involved in the cleanup must be decontaminated according to company procedures. OSHA regulations require each spill to be reviewed and reported. You can do your part by discussing with your co-workers how the spill could have been prevented and what steps might be taken to keep such spills from happening in the future. By learning from accidents, you can help prevent them.

