

Morrow County Emergency Management – CSEPP
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February 5, 2010

Dear Irrigon resident:

You will soon receive an update to your shelter-in-place kit. The additional supplies include rubber gloves, a heavy plastic bag, and a new roll of duct tape. The new materials are to help keep you safe from the unique threats posed by HD or mustard agent stored at the Umatilla Chemical Depot. Although the possibility of a mustard agent reaching Irrigon is remote, there are still scenarios in which Irrigon is at risk. While HD is not as immediately dangerous as the nerve agents GB and VX, which the Army has successfully destroyed, it still poses a significant public health and environmental threat.

Previously, the primary threat posed by the chemical warfare agents was vapor inhalation. HD, however, presents a significant contact threat. Unlike the nerve agents, HD can remain in the environment for a prolonged period. Although HD exposure is not likely to be immediately life threatening like GB or VX, contact with mustard agent can cause burn like blisters and significant long-term health consequences to the eyes and lungs. Also, HD is a known carcinogen and has been linked to development of cancers and birth defects. Compounding the problems of dealing with the consequences of an HD release is the risk of secondary exposure. Due to its persistence it can be spread by contact causing secondary exposures to first responders and medical professionals and facilities. A further complication is that the symptoms often are not apparent for up to twenty-four hours after exposure.

Consequently, the protective actions for an HD event have been modified slightly to better protect you. You will still be asked to shelter-in-place. Your shelter-in-place kit and recirculating air filter are even more effective against HD than the nerve agents. Because of HD's persistence, contact threat and risk of secondary exposure, however, we will ask to ventilate your home when we have determined that the airborne threat has passed. To avoid contact with any residual HD while ventilating, you have been provided with rubber gloves and a plastic bag in which to store the discarded duct tape and plastic. If possible, have one person hold the plastic bag open while another person places the used duct tape and plastic in it. Then, carefully remove the gloves and place them in the bag. Finally, duct tape the bag shut and contracted environmental cleanup specialists will pick it up at a later date.

After you have ventilated your home, continue to listen to the radio for further instructions. To address the persistence, contact exposure, delayed symptom onset, secondary exposure, and long term health issues associated with HD, you may be provided with assistance in evacuating your home. If it is determined that you were in an area that may have been at risk to HD exposure, you will be referred to a medical screening center. Finally, your information will be placed in a health registry to establish if there are any long-term consequences to HD exposure. Although the chances of an accident are remote, we must remain vigilant until the last HD agent at the Umatilla Chemical Depot is destroyed. If you have any questions about the characteristics of HD, the revised shelter-in-place procedures and supplies, or the extraction and medical screening process, please feel free to contact Morrow County Emergency Management at (541) 676-5161 or (541) 922-5262.

Thank you for your time and best wishes for 2010.

Sincerely,

Director
Morrow County Emergency Management