

No. 12: Hazardous Materials - Part 1

Introduction

As first responders we are called upon for a variety of reasons. It would not be uncommon to be dispatched on an investigation for an unknown substance, including responding to the scene of an emergency that involves hazardous materials.

The main goal in these situations is to respond with the knowledge, skills, and ability to perform safely. Safety is become part of the solution - not part of the problem!

Laws Pertaining to Hazardous Materials

All first responders need to have an understanding of the laws and standards that govern hazardous materials. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) amended their Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) on October 17, 1986 with the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA).

Within this Act, Title 1, Section 126E pertains to the protection and training of workers engaged in the handling of chemicals at hazardous waste sites and those persons "That respond to emergencies involving hazardous substances." Title 40 CFR Part 311 states that this law was issued requiring the EPA to set the same set of regulations for states not covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

OSHA published its "Final Rule" on the Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response - Title 29 CFR 1910.120 (HAZWOPER) on March 6, 1989 and it became effective as law on March 6, 1990. There are several areas within 1910.120 that we should be aware of:

- Emergency Response Plans
- Procedures for Handling Emergency Responses
- Post Emergency Operations
- Training and Refresher Training
- Personal Protection Equipment
- Medical Surveillance

The area that we need to focus on most within 1910.120 is subpart q the "Emergency Response to Hazardous Substance Releases" where it states "Training shall be based on the duties and functions to be performed by



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each responder of an Emergency Response Organization." The basic break down for this training falls into the following areas:

- First Responder Awareness - four hours
- First Responder Operations - eight hours
- First Responder Technician - 24 hours
- First Responder Specialist - 24 hours
- On Scene Incident Commander - 24 hours

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has three standards that related directly to hazardous materials and is one that we should be following on a more regular basis.

NFPA 471: Recommended Practice for Responding to Hazardous Materials Incidents

NFPA 472: Standard for Competence of Responders to Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction Incidents

NFPA 473: Standard for Competencies for EMS Personnel Responding to Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction Incidents

Let me leave you with one very important bit of information and that is that CFR 1910.120 also states that all emergency responders receive "Annual Refresher Training". Have you received your refresher this year?

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