



What information sources should emergency responders use?

Adequate information about on-site chemicals can make a big difference when choosing safe response strategies. Generally, emergency responders rely primarily on material safety data sheets (MSDSs). However, MSDSs may not provide sufficient information. The EPA has issued a Chemical Safety Alert to increase awareness of MSDS limitations and to help responders identify additional sources of chemical information.

One of the shortcomings of MSDSs is that they only describe the product's hazards. Once the product is in use, reactions with other chemicals and changes in temperature, pressure, or physical/chemical characteristics can change or increase the hazards. The MSDS content on emergency response procedures, fire, and reactive hazards may no longer be sufficient for responder use.

MSDSs are often vague, use technical jargon, lack information, and have data that varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. To deal with these problems, many fire department hazardous materials teams follow the "Rule of Three," which requires that three sources of information be consulted before a response decision is made.

The following information sources on the internet can help first responders:

- CAMEO RIDS — www.nsc.org/ehc/cameo.htm
- Chemical Health & Safety Data — ntp-server.niehs.nih.gov/main_pages/chem-hs.html
- Chemical Reactivity Worksheet — response.restoration.noaa.gov/chemaids/react.html
- DOT North American Emergency Response Guidebook — hazmat.dot.gov/psnsort.htm
- EPA/CEPPO — www.epa.gov/ceppo
- Hazardous Materials Guide — www.usfa.fema.gov/hazmat
- HazDat Database — atsdr1.atsdr.cdc.gov:8080/hazdat.html
- International Chemical Safety Cards — www.cdc.gov/niosh/ipcs/ipcscard.html
- Medical Management Guidelines for Acute Chemical Exposures — atsdr1.atsdr.cdc.gov:8080/mmg.html
- NIOSH Pocket Guide — www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg.html