



U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

Decontamination

Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program

In the unlikely event of a chemical emergency at an Army chemical weapons storage site, emergency officials may decontaminate some people. Decontaminate means to wash away chemical agent that may be on a person.

Most people will not need to be decontaminated. People with the greatest chance of having been exposed will be decontaminated first. Decontamination has several steps and may not be quick. Please be patient with emergency workers if there is a line of people waiting to be decontaminated. Allowing these workers to do their jobs thoroughly provides the best protection.

Emergency workers wear protective clothing, including special breathing gear, to protect them from any chemical agent. Follow their instructions closely; they have received many hours of training.

Emergency workers will do their best to protect privacy, which may be limited. People may be divided into groups by gender. Personal but necessary questions may be asked. Trained personnel are trying to determine if chemical agent exposure occurred. They are trying to determine if the individual has been in an area where there is the potential for exposure and they are looking for symptoms of agent exposure.

During the decontamination process, it may be necessary to take off clothing, jewelry and anything else removable. Emergency officials will bag personal items, which will be returned later. If time allows, place any personal items, such as wedding rings, watches, billfolds, checkbooks and important papers in a ziplock bag, appropriately labeled with contact information before leaving home. The ziplock bags may be placed in a lidded plastic bucket along with other appropriate items such as the remainder of an emergency evacuation kit. The lidded container can be decontaminated, if necessary, without damage to the contents of the container.

At the decontamination site, showers with soap are available so that any possible contamination can be thoroughly washed off. At some locations, a series of wading pools may be used instead of showers. In either case, warm water may not be available.

Once a person is decontaminated, clothing will be provided: medical coveralls and footwear (either flip-flops or medical booties). Medical personnel will be available to provide treatment, if needed. Decontaminated individuals not requiring medical treatment will be directed to a reception center or American Red Cross shelter.

For more information,
contact the CMA Public
Affairs Office at
(410) 436-3629
(800) 488-0648