

# A New Jersey Work Environment Council Fact Sheet



## Protecting Firefighters, Police, and Other Emergency Response Workers From Hazardous Materials

Employers of emergency response workers are required by law to take specific steps to protect employees from hazardous materials exposure.

The requirements are spelled out in OSHA's "Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard" (29 CFR 1910.120), often referred to as HAZWOPER.

In New Jersey, that standard is enforced for state and local public agencies by the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Program (PEOSH) in the N.J. Departments of Health (NJDOH) and Labor and Workforce Development.

### Who is Covered?

N.J. public employees covered by this standard are those involved in emergency response to uncontrolled releases of hazardous materials. This may include:

- Firefighters (including volunteer firefighters, according to PEOSH).
- Police officers.
- Emergency medical services personnel.
- Hazardous materials (HAZMAT) teams.
- Public works employees.
- Emergency management coordinators.
- Local/county health officers.

### Emergency Response Plan

Every New Jersey municipality must develop an emergency response plan (ERP). It must be in place before emergency response operations begin. The ERP must be rehearsed regularly and updated periodically. It must include:

- Pre-emergency planning.
- Training and communications.
- Emergency recognition and prevention.
- Emergency alert procedures.
- Protocols for personnel and lines of authority.
- Procedures for handling emergency incidents, including necessary air monitoring and use of effective personal protective equipment.
- Site control measures, including use of a buddy system so no one is in a contaminated zone alone.
- Evacuation routes and procedures.
- Decontamination procedures.
- Emergency medical treatment.

This plan must be in writing and be available for review and copying by employees, their representatives, and PEOSH inspectors.

The PEOSH Program has developed a guide to help municipalities comply with the ERP requirements.

## Training

The employer must provide training for employees who may be involved in HAZMAT emergencies. The level and amount of training depends on the responsibilities the employee will have.

*First Responder Awareness Level.* Employees who are likely to witness an uncontrolled release of hazardous materials and who are expected only to notify others to take action must receive training or demonstrate competency in areas such as recognizing the presence of hazardous materials in an emergency, the risks involved, and the role they play in their employer's plan. No minimum number of hours of training has been established for that level.

*First Responder Operations Level.* Employees expected to protect nearby sites or personnel through defensive measures (such as diking), but who will not in any way handle or come in contact with the hazardous material, must receive a minimum of 8 hours of training required or demonstrate competency.

*Hazardous Materials Technician or Hazardous Materials Specialist Level.* Employees responsible for handling leaking containers and taking other actions to terminate the uncontrolled release of a hazardous material must receive a minimum of 24 hours of training.

*On-Scene Incident Commander Level.* Employees who will assume control of an incident scene beyond the awareness level must receive a minimum of 24 hours of training.

Annual re-training or demonstrated competency is required at all levels.

One way of obtaining this training is through the N.J. State Police, Special Operations Section, Hazardous Materials Response Unit, which has developed free training programs for emergency responders involved in hazardous materials incidents. To arrange training, contact the County HAZMAT Training Coordinator for your county.

## Medical Surveillance

Under OSHA and PEOSH standards employers must make medical surveillance and medical consultation available

to specific employees. However, PEOSH does not require employees to participate.

Employees who should be offered medical consultation and surveillance are:

*Employees who are members of HAZMAT teams responsible for stopping uncontrolled hazardous materials releases.* In order to stop the release, these employees may approach the point of release in order to plug, patch, or otherwise stop the release of the hazardous material. These employees will have training meeting hazardous materials technician requirements.

*Employees who exhibit signs or symptoms* that may have resulted from exposure to hazardous substances during an emergency incident.

PEOSH requires that the employer adequately train employees on the benefits of medical surveillance and the potential risks to employees who wear respirators.

PEOSH also requires that medical examinations be provided at no cost to the employee and at a reasonable time and place.

For members of a HAZMAT team, the medical requirements specify a baseline physical and ongoing medical surveillance as required in 29 CFR, 1910.120(f). The medical exam must include, among other things, a determination of fitness for duty including the ability to wear any required personal protective equipment (PPE) under conditions that may be expected at the work site. The employer must obtain from the examining physician a written opinion that includes any recommended limitations, such as respirator use, on the employee's assigned work.

## Protective Clothing

Employees must be provided with chemical resistant clothing and respiratory protection to ensure protection from overexposure. Positive pressure Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) must be used whenever there is a potential inhalation hazard unless and until air monitoring proves that a reduced level of respiratory protection can be safely worn.



This fact sheet was produced by the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC), a coalition of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations. Go to [www.njwec.org](http://www.njwec.org) or email us at [info@njwec.org](mailto:info@njwec.org).

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