

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LEVELS OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENTS

I. Levels of Response to a Hazardous Materials Incident

A. Criteria for Categorization

Hazardous materials incidents are categorized as Level I, II, or III depending on the severity of the incident. The criteria used to determine the level of an incident include:

- The characteristics of the hazardous material.
- The nature of its release.
- The area affected by the hazardous materials incident (e.g., populations, sensitive ecosystems, waterways, transportation routes, etc.).
- The extent of multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional involvement.
- Evacuations, injuries or fatalities.
- The technical expertise and equipment needed to safely mitigate the incident.
- Duration

The determination of incident levels shall be a collective decision between the Incident Commander and the responding hazardous materials team. At the point terrorist activities are suspected in a hazardous materials incident, the incident will be classified as a Level III. Unlike standard Level III response activities, federal involvement and additional activities will be required.

B. Level I

A minor situation within the capabilities of first responders trained at the “operational” level. A Level I incident involves a release, or possible release, of a small amount of gas, liquid or solid of a known (identified) hazardous material. In addition, the agency on-scene has the expertise and proper equipment to safely mitigate the incident.

As a minimum, a command post and an exclusion zone should be established with all incidents. The Emergency Response Guide should be referenced for initial isolation and protective action distances. The incident commander should restrict movement of personnel into the exclusion zone. Only personnel entering for a specific reason and in the proper level of protective equipment should be allowed.

An incident should be immediately upgraded to Level II for a release or potential release of an unknown hazardous material or suspected hazardous material.

Typical Level I incidents include:

- Minor leaks or spills from a 55-gallon drum, cylinders up to one-ton capacity, bags or packages.
- Minor leaks or spills which can be handled with absorbent materials and resources readily available on-site.
- Release of chemicals which do not produce an environment which is immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) or above the Lower Explosion Limit (LEL) of a product.

- Containers that are involved in an accident that have no visible damage.
- Chemical releases that have minimal environmental impact that do not require outside resources.
- Leaking valves on containers which do not require the product to be immediately off-loaded.
- Evacuations limited to a single intersection or building.
- No life threatening situation from materials involved.
- Suspicious packages that the threat and substance are considered non-hazardous.

C. Level II

These are incidents that are beyond the capabilities of an agency with jurisdictional responsibility and that require mitigation by a hazardous materials team. This can range from a small incident involving any amount of an unknown substance to a large incident involving multiple agencies and jurisdictions.

A Level II incident should be declared by the Incident Commander and the Initial Response Team if the incident involves a sufficient quantity of gas, liquid or solid of a **known** hazardous substance or any quantity of an **unknown** material that has been released or offers the potential for release.

A Level II incident should be declared for the release of any quantity of a known solid or liquid toxic material in a critical public area or for the release or potential release of any quantity of an **unknown** solid, liquid or gaseous toxic material or suspected toxic material (all gases other than natural gas are considered toxic).

In a Level II incident, a formal and properly identified Command Post with a removed staging area, an Incident Safety Officer, and a Hazardous Materials Sector should be established. Control zones must be established and maintained as early as possible, and evaluated and monitored throughout the incident. Localized evacuation may need to be implemented and outside agencies should be notified.

Typical Level II incidents include:

- One or more 55-gallon drums, one-ton cylinders, nurse tanks, totes, portable containers that are leaking considerable amounts of a known substance.
- A major, liquefied gas leak due to puncture, crack or crease of a large tank where ignition sources are a real threat.
- Leaking containers, tank trucks or railroad tank cars with a hazardous material on board whose structural integrity is in question.
- Train derailments involving railroad tank cars filled with hazardous materials with leaks that can be controlled by local hazardous materials teams.
- A vehicle or train fire involving hazardous materials or hazardous wastes that pose a serious threat of a boiling liquid expanding vapor explosion (BLEVE).
- Incidents involving a fatality or serious injury attributed to the hazardous substance.
- Evacuations consisting of an apartment complex, city block or large facility with many employees.
- Chemical releases that pose a moderate threat to the environment that requires state agency involvement.
- Suspicious package that has an unknown material but due to location is considered a credible threat. When the substance is identified and declared a WMD agent, the incident should be upgraded to a Level III incident. Incidents that involved non-hazardous substances should be downgraded to a Level I incident.

D. Level III

This includes any incident beyond the capabilities of the hazardous materials team and local resources. The incident may be quite lengthy in duration and may necessitate large-scale evacuations. It is likely a Level III incident will involve multiple agencies and jurisdictions, as well as resources from the private sector (including chemical manufacturers) and voluntary organizations.

Examples of Level III incidents include:

- Large releases from tank cars, tank trucks, stationary tanks or multiple medium containers.
- Incidents involving large-scale evacuations that may extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries.
- Any spill, leak or fire involving hazardous materials that has gone to greater alarms.
- Any incident beyond local capabilities and resources (including the hazardous materials team) to safely identify, contain and mitigate.
- Train derailments involving railroad tank cars containing hazardous materials that require specialized resources to mitigate.
- Major leaks of compressed or liquefied gas cargo tanks or railroad tank cars caused by puncture or major structural damage.
- Suspicious packages that due to location, identification of material as WMD agent, or verbal threat that requires state and federal resources.
- Large-scale or catastrophic releases of hazardous materials (e.g., radiation, biological agents) that would likely include a Stafford Act ESF-10 activation.