



Chemical Terrorism

Terrorists could deliberately release chemicals that poison people, animals, plants, or the environment. Chemical “agents” can be delivered in various forms—vapors, aerosols, liquids, and solids—and by a wide variety of methods, including sprays and bombs.

Some chemicals with potential for terrorism—nerve agents, mustard gases, and choking agents—were developed for use in war. Others are used in industry, and still others can be made from natural or everyday household materials. Some chemical agents are difficult to produce, but the potential for release by terrorist attack exists anywhere hazardous industrial or military chemicals are stored.

Chemical agents can produce effects quickly (within a few seconds) or slowly (as much as two days after exposure), and some are odorless and tasteless. It is difficult to deliver chemical agents in lethal concentrations, and—outdoors—agents often dissipate rapidly.

Hazardous chemicals can be categorized by type or effect. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes the following categories:

- Long-acting anticoagulants—cause uncontrolled bleeding
- Biotoxins—come from plants or animals
- Blister agents (“vesicants”)—blister the eyes, skin, or throat and lungs
- Blood agents—absorbed into the blood
- Caustics (acids)—burn on contact
- Choking, lung, and pulmonary agents
- Incapacitating agents—alter consciousness or thinking
- Metallic poisons
- Nerve agents—prevent the nervous system from working properly
- Organic solvents—damage living tissues by dissolving fats and oils
- Tear gas and riot control agents
- Toxic alcohols
- Vomiting agents

How to Prepare

A chemical attack could come without warning, and there are few advance precautions:

- 1 **Stay informed.** ALL Marines (active duty and Reserve), civil service, and contractor personnel with a NIPR computer account—verify and update official contact information populated in the **Marine Corps Enterprise Mass Notification System (eMNS)** by information found in the Global Address List (GAL), and self-register all cell phones, home phone, email addresses, etc. in eMNS. Registration of personal information enhances Marine Corps Installations’ ability to rapidly provide emergency information and changes to the base’s operating status during non-working hours and wherever you are.
- 2 Stay informed also by monitoring radio and TV alerts.
- 3 Make a family **evacuation plan**.
- 4 Make an **emergency communication plan** in case family members are separated.
- 5 Choose an internal room for sheltering-in-place, preferably one without windows and on the highest level.
- 6 Build an **emergency kit**, and be sure to include duct tape, scissors, and plastic sheeting to seal the room in which you will shelter.
- 7 Consider precutting the plastic to save critical time during an emergency. Cut each piece several inches larger than the door, window, or vent you want to cover so that it lies flat against the wall. Label each piece as to where it fits.
- 8 Report suspicious activity at www.USMCEagleEyes.org.

Set your own course through any hazard: stay informed, make a plan, build a kit. Live Ready Marine Corps.



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How to Recognize Chemical Attack

People exposed to hazardous chemicals may experience eye irritation; become nauseated; lose coordination; or have difficulty breathing or a burning sensation in the nose, throat, and lungs. The presence of many dead or ailing birds or insects may also indicate a chemical agent release. Your first warning may be an emergency broadcast or some other signal used in your community.

What to Do in the Event of a Chemical Attack

If you are caught in or near an area contaminated by chemical attack or see signs of one:

- Try quickly to define the source or impacted area, and find clean air quickly.
- If the chemical is inside a building where you are, try to exit the building without passing through the contaminated area. If there is no safe path out, move as far away as possible and shelter in place.
- If you are outside, quickly decide the fastest way to find clean air—move away upwind of the contamination or enter the closest building for shelter.
- If you decide or are instructed to remain inside (“shelter-in-place”):
 - » Close doors, windows, and vents. Turn off all air-handling equipment. (Conventional building filters and cloth breathing filters are ineffective against chemical agents.)
 - » Take a kit, and go to an internal, upper-level room.
 - » Seal the room with tape and plastic, if possible.
 - » Monitor radio, TV, or the Internet for official information and instructions.
 - » Do not go outdoors until authorities announce it is safe to do so.
- If your eyes water, your skin stings, or you have trouble breathing, you may have been exposed to a hazardous chemical. To minimize health consequences, decontaminate yourself and others as soon as possible—every minute counts:
 - » Remove as much clothing as possible; and double-seal it in plastic. Cut it away if necessary to avoid contact with the eyes, nose, and mouth. Remove contact lenses or glasses. (Seal lenses with clothes; wash glasses in household bleach or soap and rinse before wearing again).
 - » Find any source of water and flush the eyes.
 - » Wash face, hair, and other affected body parts with soap, gently so as not to scrub the chemical into the skin. (Washing is less critical if the chemical agent is a vapor instead of a liquid or solid.)
 - » Change into uncontaminated clothes—clothes stored in drawers or closets are likely to be uncontaminated.
 - » Seek immediate medical attention.
 - » Avoid recontamination by later touching affected areas and bagged items. Use and decontaminate or safely discard gloves and tools.



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Where to Find Additional Information

- Live radio and TV broadcasts may have the most current information on chemical terrorism events and the appropriate actions to take.
- The following agencies offer more detailed and updated information about chemical threats:
 - » Department of Homeland Security (Ready.gov) & FEMA—www.ready.gov/chemical-threats
 - » CDC—www.bt.cdc.gov/chemical
The CDC website offers detailed information about specific chemical threats in the categories listed on the other side of this sheet.
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)—www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxicsubstances.html
The ATSDR website also offers detailed information about specific hazardous chemicals.

