



Coffee Break Training - Hazardous Materials

Chemical Assisted Suicide

No. HM-2013-2 July 22, 2013

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to identify the signs of a potential chemical or detergent suicide incident.

Chemical suicide, also known as detergent suicide, is an increasingly common method of committing suicide. It is often communicated as an easy, quick and painless way to end one's life. The technique originated in Japan but has been spreading across the United States via instructions posted on the Internet. Chemical suicide involves mixing two or more inexpensive, common household chemicals in an enclosed space. The chemical mixtures produce a heat-releasing — or exothermic — reaction and create toxic gases that quickly fill an enclosed area.

Chemical suicides typically occur in personal vehicles, closets, bathrooms and other small, confined spaces where the concentration of gas can quickly accumulate to levels that are lethal not only to suicide victims but also to emergency responders. To prevent injury or death to emergency responders reporting to chemical suicides, it is essential to conduct a careful and detailed scene assessment and patient size-up in any situation involving an unresponsive person in an enclosed space.

Below are key indicators of potential chemical or detergent suicide scenes:

- Unresponsive subject inside the vehicle. Subject committing suicide with the proper chemical mixtures will be dead instantly. Subject may have a seatbelt fastened to prevent his or her body from falling onto the horn and alerting others.
- Subject wearing goggles or gloves to prevent chemical burns before his or her death.
- Warning signs (such as HAZMAT or SUICIDE) taped to the window or door of a vehicle or room.
- Yellow/Green or white residue on a vehicle's seats or dashboard. This residue has been found in almost all chemical suicide cases.
- Windows fogged or tinted with yellow/green residue.
- Pennies in the vehicle or vehicle console area will be tarnished with residue.
- Smell of rotten eggs or sulfur, indicating the presence of hydrogen sulfide.
- Smell of bitter or burnt almonds, indicating the presence of hydrogen cyanide.
- Empty household cleaning containers on the floorboard or seat of a vehicle.
- One or more large buckets visible.
- Vehicle's inside door handles removed, which prevents a subject who has changed his or her mind from stopping the suicide process.
- Duct tape, plastic or towels to cover air vents, windows and doors. This prevents the deadly chemical mixture from seeping out.



Indicators include not only the two signs but also where the car is parked — a cemetery. *Photo courtesy of Region VII EMS.*

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