



FIRE MARSHAL BULLETIN

SAFETY NOTICE: A recent incident in Nassau County has reinforced the importance of reviewing the following information with all emergency responders.

Please duplicate as necessary for widest distribution among Public Safety agencies.

CHEMICAL SUICIDES

Chemical suicides have been an emerging trend in the United States since about 2008. The first such death in New York was documented in 2009, and it can be expected that such events will continue to increase.

Chemical Suicide or Suicide by HazMat is the mixing of sulfur-based compounds with an acid, all of which are commonly found household cleaning agents, which creates a deadly hydrogen sulfide gas. Thus far, as of June, 2011 there have been reports of 38 chemical suicides in the United States, and as stated above, one attempt in Nassau County. Instructions for chemical suicides continue to be readily available on the internet.

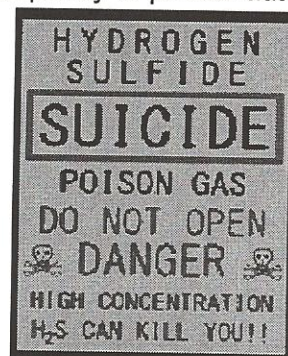
It is urgent that ALL responders continue to be vigilant in their approach to such potential incidents.

The National HazMat Fusion Center, with the help of the NYS Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) has established best practice guidelines for a response to a chemical suicide incident.

The information below is also available for download from their web site, www.hazmatfc.com. The associated flow chart which may be downloaded can be laminated and placed in response vehicles.

There is the potential for chemical suicide in any area, such as a house, business occupancy or private auto. However, to this date, most such incidents have occurred within vehicles. In the past, most persons attempting this suicide method have posted warning signs in their vehicles to alert emergency responders, but this cannot be counted on for all such incidents. Another great area of concern is the migration from chemical suicide to possible chemical homicide.

INDICATORS OF A POSSIBLE CHEMICAL SUICIDE: When a call comes in for a person who is or may be unconscious or sleeping in a vehicle or other confined space, ask yourself questions about the scene to consider if the incident is a possible chemical suicide.

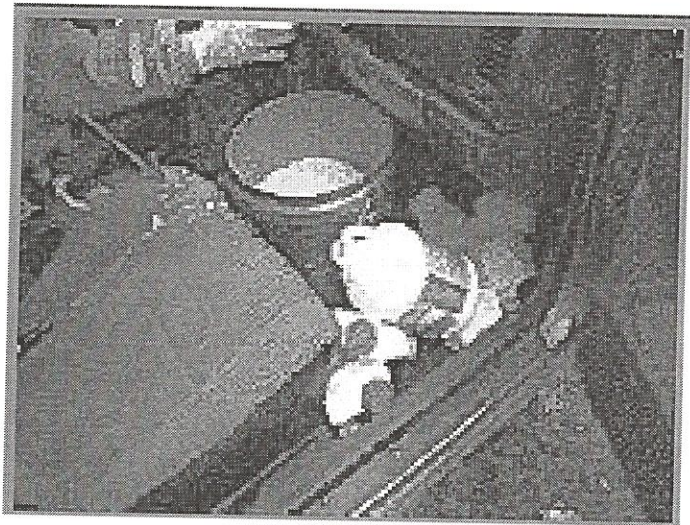


It is critical that first responders and citizens exercise extreme caution and/or stay clear from vehicles if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Unresponsive subject within a vehicle
- Warning sign(s) taped to the vehicle door or placed inside a window – May indicate HAZMAT or SUICIDE (see example at right). Not all chemical suicide cases will post warning signs;
- Smell of rotten egg or sulfur – the smell of rotten egg which may indicate the presence of hydrogen sulfide
- Smell of bitter or burnt almonds which may indicate the presence of hydrogen cyanide

It should be noted that someone committing suicide with the proper chemical mixture will be dead almost immediately. They may have seatbelt fastened to prevent body from falling onto horn, alerting others. In several documented cases, subjects wore goggles and gloves to prevent chemical burn before their death. Note: Pennies (coins) in the vehicle or console area may be tarnished with residue, due to a chemical reaction.

Empty household cleaning containers on the floor board or seat should raise a higher level of concern. Note: Bonide pesticide containers commonly have purple caps and are found in many chemical suicide cases. One or more large buckets may be visible for mixing the acid base and sulfur chemical. Subject may also use the center console or glove box to mix the chemicals



In NO case should a vehicle entry or opening of said vehicle be attempted without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including a high level of respiratory protection.

FIRST RESPONDERS SUSPECTING AN INCIDENT TO BE A CHEMICAL SUICIDE SHOULD REQUEST IMMEDIATE HAZMAT TEAM ASSISTANCE.

Victims who have attempted such a suicide should not be transported until decontamination efforts have been initiated, as the threat to ambulance and hospital contamination would otherwise exist.

Also, remember that such an incident rises to the level of a crime scene, and if local police are not already on scene, they should be requested to respond by the Officer in Charge.