

## INTRODUCTION TO THE TABLE OF INITIAL ISOLATION AND PROTECTIVE ACTION DISTANCES

The Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances suggests distances useful to protect people from vapors resulting from spills involving dangerous goods which are considered toxic by inhalation (TIH), including certain chemical warfare agents, or which produce toxic gases upon contact with water. The Table provides first responders with initial guidance until technically qualified emergency response personnel are available. **Distances show areas likely to be affected during the first 30 minutes after materials are spilled and could increase with time.**

The **Initial Isolation Zone** defines an area SURROUNDING the incident in which persons may be exposed to dangerous (upwind) and life threatening (downwind) concentrations of material. The **Protective Action Zone** defines an area DOWNWIND from the incident in which persons may become incapacitated and unable to take protective action and/or incur serious or irreversible health effects. The Table provides specific guidance for small and large spills occurring day or night.

Adjusting distances for a specific incident involves many interdependent variables and should be made only by personnel technically qualified to make such adjustments. For this reason, no precise guidance can be provided in this document to aid in adjusting the table distances; however, general guidance follows.

### **Factors That May Change the Protective Action Distances**

**The guide for a material** (orange-bordered pages) clearly indicates under the section EVACUATION – Fire, the evacuation distance required to protect against fragmentation hazard of a large container. If the material becomes involved in a **FIRE**, the toxic hazard may become less important than the fire or explosion hazard.

If more than one tank car, cargo tank, portable tank, or large cylinder involved in the incident is leaking, LARGE SPILL distances may need to be increased.

For a material with a protective action distance of 11.0+ km (7.0+ miles), the actual distance can be larger in certain atmospheric conditions. If the dangerous goods vapor plume is channeled in a valley or between many tall buildings, distances may be larger than shown in the Table due to less mixing of the plume with the atmosphere. Daytime spills in regions with known strong inversions or snow cover, or occurring near sunset, accompanied by a steady wind, may require an increase in protective action distance. When these conditions are present, airborne contaminants mix and disperse more slowly and may travel much farther downwind. In addition, protective action distances may be larger for liquid spills when either the material or outdoor temperature exceeds 30° C (86°F).

Materials which react with water to produce large amounts of toxic gases are included in the Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances. Note that some water-reactive materials

(WRM) which are also TIH (e.g., Bromine trifluoride (1746), Thionyl chloride (1836), etc.) produce additional TIH materials when spilled in water. For these materials, two entries are provided in the Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances (i.e., for spills on land and for spills in water). If it is not clear whether the spill is on land or in water, or in cases where the spill occurs both on land and in water, choose the larger Protective Action Distance. Following the Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances is a table that lists the materials which, when spilled in water, produce toxic gases. The toxic gases that these water-reactive materials (WRM) produce are also included in the Table.

When a water-reactive TIH producing material is spilled into a river or stream, the source of the toxic gas may move with the current and stretch from the spill point downstream for a substantial distance.

Certain chemical warfare agents have been added to the Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances. The distances shown were calculated using worst case scenarios for these agents **when used as a weapon**.

Initial isolation and protective action distances in this guidebook are derived from historical data on transportation incidents and the use of statistical models. For worst case scenarios involving the instantaneous release of the entire contents of a package (e.g., as a result of terrorism, sabotage or catastrophic accident) the distances may increase. The increase can be estimated by multiplying the distances by a factor of two (2).

## PROTECTIVE ACTION DECISION FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The choice of protective actions for a given situation depends on a number of factors. For some cases, evacuation may be the best option; in others, sheltering in-place may be the best course. Sometimes, these two actions may be used in combination. In any emergency, officials need to quickly give the public instructions. The public will need continuing information and instructions while being evacuated or sheltered in-place.

Proper evaluation of the factors listed below will determine the effectiveness of evacuation or in-place protection. The importance of these factors can vary with emergency conditions. In specific emergencies, other factors may need to be identified and considered as well. This list indicates what kind of information may be needed to make the initial decision.

### **The Dangerous Goods**

- Degree of health hazard
- Chemical and physical properties
- Amount involved
- Containment/control of release
- Rate of vapor movement

### **The Population Threatened**

- Location
- Number of people
- Time available to evacuate or shelter in-place
- Ability to control evacuation or shelter in-place
- Building types and availability
- Special institutions or populations, e.g., nursing homes, hospitals, prisons

### **Weather Conditions**

- Effect on vapor and cloud movement
- Potential for change
- Effect on evacuation or protection in-place

## PROTECTIVE ACTIONS

**Protective Actions** are those steps taken to preserve the health and safety of emergency responders and the public during an incident involving releases of dangerous goods. The Table of Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances (green-bordered pages) predicts the size of downwind areas which could be affected by a cloud of toxic gas. People in this area should be evacuated and/or sheltered in-place inside buildings.

**Isolate Hazard Area and Deny Entry** means keep everybody away from the area if they are not directly involved in emergency response operations. Unprotected emergency responders should not be allowed to enter the isolation zone. This "isolation" task is done first to establish control over the area of operations. This is the first step for any protective actions that may follow. See the Table of Isolation and Protective Action Distances (green-bordered pages) for more detailed information on specific materials.

**Evacuate** means move all people from a threatened area to a safer place. To perform an evacuation, there must be enough time for people to be warned, to get ready, and to leave an area. If there is enough time, evacuation is the best protective action. Begin evacuating people nearby and those outdoors in direct view of the scene. When additional help arrives, expand the area to be evacuated downwind and crosswind to at least the extent recommended in this guidebook. Even after people move to the distances recommended, they may not be completely safe from harm. They should not be permitted to congregate at such distances. Send evacuees to a definite place, by a specific route, far enough away so they will not have to be moved again if the wind shifts.

**Shelter In-Place** means people should seek shelter inside a building and remain inside until the danger passes. **Sheltering in-place is used when evacuating the public would cause greater risk than staying where they are, or when an evacuation cannot be performed.** Direct the people inside to **close all doors and windows** and to **shut off all ventilating, heating and cooling systems.** In-place protection may not be the best option if (a) the vapors are flammable; (b) if it will take a long time for the gas to clear the area; or (c) if buildings cannot be closed tightly. Vehicles can offer some protection for a short period if the windows are closed and the ventilating systems are shut off. Vehicles are not as effective as buildings for in-place protection.

**It is vital to maintain communications with competent persons inside the building** so that they are advised about changing conditions. **Persons protected-in-place should be warned to stay far from windows** because of the danger from glass and projected metal fragments in a fire and/or explosion.

Every dangerous goods incident is different. Each will have special problems and concerns. Action to protect the public must be selected carefully. These pages can help with **initial** decisions on how to protect the public. Officials must continue to gather information and monitor the situation until the threat is removed.

## **BACKGROUND ON THE INITIAL ISOLATION AND PROTECTIVE ACTION DISTANCE TABLE**

Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances in this guidebook were determined for small and large spills occurring during day or night. The overall analysis was statistical in nature and utilized state-of-the-art emission rate and dispersion models; statistical release data from the U.S. DOT HMIS (Hazardous Materials Incident Reporting System) database; 5 years of meteorological observations from over 120 locations in United States, Canada and Mexico; and the most current toxicological exposure guidelines.

For each chemical, thousands of hypothetical releases were modeled to account for the statistical variation in both release amount and atmospheric conditions. Based on this statistical sample, the 90% percentile Protective Action Distance for each chemical and category was selected to appear in the Table. A brief description of the analysis is provided below. A detailed report outlining the methodology and data used in the generation of the Initial Isolation and Protective Action Distances may be obtained from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Special Programs Administration.

**Release amounts and emission rates** into the atmosphere were statistically modeled based on (1) data from the U.S. DOT HMIS database; (2) container types and sizes authorized for transport as specified in 49 CFR §172.101 and Part 173; (3) physical properties of the materials involved, and (4) atmospheric data from a historical database. The emission model calculated the release of vapor due to evaporation of pools on the ground, direct release of vapors from the container, or a combination of both, as would occur for liquefied gases which can flash to form both a vapor/aerosol mixture and an evaporating pool. In addition, the emission model also calculated the emission of toxic vapor by-products generated from spilling water-reactive chemicals in water. Spills that involve releases of approximately 200 liters or less are considered Small Spills, while spills that involve quantities greater than 200 liters are considered Large Spills.

**Downwind dispersion** of the vapor was estimated for each case modeled. Atmospheric parameters affecting the dispersion, and the emission rate, were selected in a statistical fashion from a database containing hourly meteorological data from 120 cities in United States, Canada and Mexico. The dispersion calculation accounted for the time dependent emission rate from the source as well as the density of the vapor plume (i.e., heavy gas effects). Since atmospheric mixing is less effective at dispersing vapor plumes during nighttime, day and night were separated in the analysis. In the Table, "Day" refers to time periods after sunrise and before sunset, while "Night" includes all hours between sunset and sunrise.

**Toxicological short-term exposure guidelines** for the chemicals were applied to determine the downwind distance to which persons may become incapacitated and unable to take protective action or may incur serious health effects. Toxicological exposure guidelines were chosen from (1) emergency response guidelines, (2) occupational health guidelines, or (3) lethal concentrations determined from animal studies, as recommended by an independent panel of toxicological experts from industry and academia.