

“Hazardous Materials and Amateur Radio”

Hazardous materials are almost everywhere.

There is increasing concerns about the impact of hazardous materials incidents on transportation systems. A single hazardous materials incident has the potential for loss of lives and millions of dollars in property damage!

It is impossible to imagine a community which does not have hazardous materials transported on its streets. The Congressional Office of Technology Assessment has estimated that more than 1.5 billion tons of hazardous materials are transported per year! It is important therefore, that Amateur Radio operators, recognize the widespread presence of these materials, understand the possible consequences of a spill or release and be prepared to take appropriate actions in case of an incident involving hazardous materials.

Labels

Warning labels are the best indication that hazardous materials are present and must be displayed on most packages containing hazardous materials. Labels are diamond shaped, 4 inches on a side; color coded and show a graphic symbol depicting the hazard class.

Placards

Placards are similar to the hazard warning labels discussed above, except that they are displayed on transport vehicles, such as tractor-trailers and rail cars. They are also diamond-shaped (although 10 inches on a side), color-coded and bear a graphic symbol indicating the class of hazard.

Become a Trained Observer

If you should witness or come upon a transportation incident, your first concern should be for your own safety. If a highway accident has occurred, hazardous materials may be present; people may be injured and the authorities will certainly need this information when notified. As a trained observer, you should always be cautious and prepared to take actions to protect yourself. If you see a placarded vehicle, or a rail car in an accident or see damaged packages with colored warning labels, you should take action to protect yourself and set an example for others by moving away from the incident, and notify local or state authorities immediately.

When reporting an incident in which hazardous materials are involved, it is important to describe the situation and let them know if you seen hazmat labels in order to get an appropriate and informed response by the emergency services. Your accurate report should provide emergency responders with the warning they would not otherwise have had, until their own arrival. The value of Amateur Radio operators in emergency situations is well documented;

Summary

Hazardous materials are widely transported, transportation accidents involving hazardous materials often result in serious consequences, and Amateur Radio operators can provide assistance to emergency response personnel.