

Ministry of the Environment

Responding to Spills and Emergencies

Introduction

Spills of hazardous materials and other pollutants can threaten people, property and the environment. The Ministry of the Environment (MOE) serves primarily as a regulatory agency. MOE can also be called upon to help deal with environmental concerns resulting from spills and to provide information and advice to fire departments and other first response agencies.

Municipalities often provide containment and cleanup measures for spills to their roadways and drainage systems. The primary responsibility for public health and safety in an emergency resulting from a spill or a fire rests with the municipality. A fire chief or local medical officer of health can initiate public safety measures including evacuation or shelter-in-place orders.

Ministry Mandate

MOE's regulatory mandate for spills arises largely out of Part X of the **Environmental Protection Act**, which requires spills to be reported forthwith. Part X also requires the owner of the spilled material, and the person who had control of a material when it was spilled to promptly clean up and restore the environment. The ministry ensures that the cleanup and disposal of spilled materials is done in an environmentally acceptable manner.

When those under statutory duties cannot or will not respond adequately, the Minister has the authority under the **Environmental Protection Act** to order those responsible for the spill to clean

up the site. Should they fail to comply with such orders; the ministry can undertake the cleanup and recover costs.

By *Order in Council* under the **Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act**, the Minister has responsibility for spill and drinking water emergencies. To this end, the Ministry has developed an Emergency Management Program that includes an Emergency Response Plan, a Continuity of Operations Plan and an Emergency Operations Centre.

The Ministry is committed to providing timely services for receiving, assessing and coordinating responses to spills. These service commitments are facilitated by the Spills Action Centre (SAC), and a province-wide Ministry field response capacity in MOE's Operations Division. Further support is provided by a network of additional resources available from other parts of the Ministry.

Spills Action Centre (1-800-268-6060)

The role of Spills Action Centre (SAC) is to receive reports of spills and other environmental matters and initiate or co-ordinate a response as required. SAC is staffed on a 24-hour basis and can be reached with a province-wide, toll-free telephone number (1-800-268-6060).

SAC has access to extensive chemical database systems and often provides clean up advice over the phone. Depending on the nature and impact of an incident, SAC can activate various levels of ministry response as follows.

District-level Response

The ministry's first level of field response is provided by environmental officers working out of the ministry's district or area offices. For example, an accident involving a tanker truck that has spilled a load of chemicals onto a highway, the District response staff assess the situation and determine what actions need to be taken and what additional resources may be needed.

Outside of regular working hours, each district office has an on-call environmental response person who is sent out by SAC if certain criteria are met. Depending on the location of an event, an after-hours District-level field response person is generally within about two hours.

Regional-level Response

A Regional-level ministry response is triggered to supplement the District-level response with technical support and other resources through the ministry's five regional offices. For example, Region-level ministry support may be required for a significant chemical fire. Regional assistance or expertise may include:

- Staff, equipment and technical expertise for complex incidents;
- Air or water monitoring or modeling and interpretation (a picture of existing and projected conditions);
- Support, guidance and approval to initiate directions, approvals or orders under the *Environmental Protection Act*.

An after-hours, regional-level ministry field response can be expected within three to four hours, subject to the availability of equipment and staff.

Additional Ministry Resources

When an emergency requires additional MOE support beyond those available at the regional and district levels, the ministry may call upon the following resources:

- The **Drinking Water Management Division** staff can be called upon to assist when spills or spill emergencies threaten drinking water supplies.
- The **Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Branch** (EMRB) may provide on-site specialized air monitoring at prolonged industrial or chemical fire using one of its two mobile trace atmospheric gas analyzers (TAGA). TAGA measurements may be used to determine when it is safe for residents to return home. EMRB may also be called upon to provide meteorology, as well as air and water modeling support.
- The **Standards Development Branch** can provide information on chemical and physical properties of contaminants and pesticides, and can provide expertise on toxicology and air and water standards.
- The **Laboratory Services Branch** can conduct rapid analysis of samples, which may be important for making decisions regarding response actions and cleanup procedures.
- The **Waste Management Policy Branch** advises on the safe transportation and disposal of wastes from spills and emergencies.
- **Communications Branch** provides communications support beyond that which is available at the Regional offices.

For More Information, Contact:

MOE Emergency Management Coordinator:
(416) 325-1995, or

Spills Action Centre at: 1-800-268-6060