



RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

With Guyana's rapidly expanding industrial, manufacturing and agricultural sectors, it is important to plan for emergencies, both at the level of the operator and the regulator. According to the United Nations Environment Program, an environmental emergency is a sudden-onset disaster or accident resulting from natural, technological or human-induced factors, or a combination of these, that causes or threatens to cause severe environmental damage as well as harm to human health and or livelihoods. Planning for environmental emergencies includes plans highlighting the important elements of both environmental and human health protection and sustainability of resources.

The EPA is the lead first responder to environmental emergencies, and would also provide technical support to sister agencies responding to environmental emergencies, including the Civil Defense Commission (CDC) and the Guyana Geologies and Mines Commission.

Given the EPA's mandate to oversee the effective management, conservation, protection and improvement of the environment; and to prevent or control pollution, it is our responsibility to respond in an operational role for environmental emergencies. Technical advice is provided before, during, and after emergencies to the government, industry, and the community through scientific, engineering, and regulatory expertise on the environment and impacts to health from pollution caused.

Besides the major benefit of providing guidance during an emergency, developing a plan has other advantages. During emergency response, discoveries of unrecognized hazardous conditions that would intensify an emergency situation can be addressed to eliminate them. The planning process often times highlights or pinpoints challenges such as the lack of resources (equipment, trained personnel, supplies, etc.), or items that can be corrected before an emergency occurs. In addition, an emergency plan promotes safety awareness and shows the organization's commitment to the safety of its workers.

As the probability of an occurrence of an emergency is often times high, preplanning is necessary. An urgent need for rapid decisions, shortage of time, and lack of resources and trained personnel can lead to chaos during an emergency. Time and circumstances in an

emergency mean that normal channels of authority and communication cannot be relied upon to function routinely. The stress of the situation can lead to poor judgment resulting in severe losses. A well thought out, well organized emergency response plan will help to eliminate these issues.

The EPA CDC has developed a number of plans to respond to environmental emergencies including the Guyana National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (August 2020), Flood Preparedness and Response Plan, and Disaster Risk Management. Environmental emergencies that have gotten the EPA's attention during the past year and to date included tailings spills, chemical spills, fuel spills, and a suspected oil spill. Other emergencies include bird strikes and fish kills, as well as spin off incidents from natural hazards e.g. an earthquake damaging an industrial facility, which in turn releases hazardous materials.

The EPA's Emergency Response System (EERS) has two designated telephone numbers that members of the public can dial to report environmental emergencies and request the Agency's response. The EERS will be operational daily on a 24 hours system. The numbers designated for the EERS are (592)- 225-5469 and 592-623-4594. As part of this system, the Agency has developed a roster of officers who are specialized and prepared to respond to specific environmental emergencies e.g. fish kills, chemical spills etc.

References

<https://dipecholac.net/docs/files/785-guyana-cd-v38-finaldraft-all-low-res.pdf>

https://cdc.gy/?page_id=14366

<https://www.unicef.org/guyanasuriname/emergency-preparedness-and-disaster-risk-management>

You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O Communications Department, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook and Instagram, and subscribe to our YouTube channel.