

THE CHEMICAL SUICIDE PHENOMENON: WHERE IS IT HEADED?

Chemical suicides have plagued the United States since 2008, and continue to be on the rise. Mixing of sulfur based compounds with an acid, both of which are found in common household cleaning agents, will create deadly hydrogen sulfide gas. Thus far this year there have been 29 chemical suicides in the United States. The demographics are starting to shift to a younger crowd, and are now beginning to branch into different ideology. **It is extremely important that ALL responders continue to be vigilant in their approach to such potential incidents.**

Instructions for chemical suicides continue to be readily available on the internet, with new versions giving very explicit information on how to make and generate hydrogen sulfide gas. Premade signs continue to be available as well. The easily recognizable incidents will have signs posted in the vehicle windows or inside the structure, as is the case in 90% of all incidents. There are however the not so easily recognizable incidents where there are no signs and little in the way of clues. This is where we need to have a heightened sense of awareness.

The National HazMat Fusion Center, with the help of the New York State Office of Fire Prevention & Control (OFPC), has established best practice guidelines for a response to a chemical suicide incident. The information is available in a flow chart and may be downloaded from their web site, www.hazmatfc.com. It is recommended the flow chart be laminated and placed in all response vehicles.

There is the potential for chemical suicide incidents to start occurring at middle and high schools. The talk on the internet chat sites is that younger and younger individuals are looking to use, or choose, this method for committing suicide. The concern is that there will be a shift to the "suicide pact" method, as has recently been seen in the UK. The concern is that two or three students may make their way to the school parking lot and commit suicide using the hydrogen sulfide method.

Another great area of concern is the migration from chemical suicide to chemical homicide. The possibility of meth houses or other types of drug related locations may make a "hanging mixture". This is accomplished by placing the acid in a shallow pan, or some other type of shallow vessel and hanging the sulfur in a zip-lock type baggie, attached to a release device. When a door or windows are opened, the sulfur is released into the acid, reacting almost instantaneously to create hydrogen sulfide gas, literally in the face of the responders.

It is highly likely that there will continue to be an increase in these incidents. OFPC will continue to release updates as new information becomes available. Anyone with questions or needing further information should contact OFPC at 518-474-6746 and ask for Deputy Chief Jake Oreshan of the Hazardous Materials / Homeland Security Bureau.

Sources: National HazMat Fusion Center, www.hazmatfc.com, statistics and trends; New York State Office of Fire Prevention & Control, **Chemical Suicides Training**, Hazardous Materials / Homeland Security Bureau (in progress).



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**FIRE PREVENTION
 & CONTROL**

phone 518.474.6746
fax 518.474.3240
email fire@dos.state.ny.us