

SECTION 35: SAFETY ISSUES FOR ARES PERSONNEL

Many emergency response volunteers have never been exposed to the safety training that is provided by large companies. In fact, many people go through their entire lifetime without ever taking a safety course! This document will not make you a safety expert. It is intended to fill a void for people who have had no safety training and to demonstrate to them that they need to participate in health and safety training that may be available through their employer or other safety-training providers.

BASICS

You are entitled to a safe place to work. As an employee, you have the right to know about a hazardous situation. You also have the right to refuse to work in dangerous surroundings or to perform a job that you aren't capable of doing safely. Employers provide each employee with the information, instruction, and supervision necessary to ensure their safety. They make each employee aware of known hazards. They respond as soon as possible to reports of hazards, report all incidents, and maintain records. In other words, you are entitled to a safe place to work.

EMERGENCY CONDITIONS

This is all very good in theory but as an emergency response volunteer, you may find yourself in the middle of a hazardous situation with no time for training! You may wind up in a situation that was never anticipated or experienced by you or anyone else in the area! To determine whether you can perform the required tasks safely, you may have to rely on your senses and judgment and on fellow workers whom you've never seen before. Each situation is different and therefore these steps need to be adjusted to suit the situation. However, your safety and that of your co-workers is always, always, always, your number one priority! Remember, rarely is there ever just one person killed in a confined space. It is always two, the victim and the first rescuer!

PRIORITY ONE

Your personal safety is your number one priority.

The health and safety of the emergency response volunteers is of paramount importance! You are there to help and you must ensure that you don't become another victim who has to be rescued!

PRIORITY TWO

Secure the site!

The site must be secured so that no one else gets hurt, victims are safe, and evidence is preserved. This means blocking access to the site to keep others out.

LAST PRIORITY

Only after ensuring the safety of the rescuers, other people, and the securing the site, can you do what you came to do!

QUALIFICATIONS

If, when you arrive at the site of an incident, you see someone working there; don't assume that it is safe for you to be there too. That person may have special

training or safety equipment and be using procedures that allow them to work safely in an environment that would be hazardous to others. On the other hand, they may simply have bad judgment and no safety training! Play it safe! Utilize the expertise of trusted individuals and site supervisors.

HAZARDS

A hazard is a condition or changing set of circumstances that has the potential to cause injury or illness or damage to equipment or property. To properly assess a hazard, you need to know the work area, processes, activities, equipment, tools, and supplies that are present or used in the immediate area. You may even need the expertise of a structural engineer and special machinery before proceeding. As an emergency volunteer who has just arrived on site, some of this may be impossible. If you're lucky, you may be able to acquire some of this information from people who live or work in the immediate area or from other emergency workers who arrived before you. Use your senses but don't rely solely on them. There may be hidden hazards such as odorless chemicals or gasses. A puddle of liquid that looks like water may be a corrosive, explosive, or poisonous chemical. Major hazards may distract you long enough to walk into a less obvious but just as deadly situation! Be alert for commonplace items that may be overlooked. For example, guards or shields may be missing from tools or equipment and with the many distractions around you they just might "jump up and bite you"!

SUMMARY

- Protect others.
- Secure the site.
- Identify and assess the hazards.
- Determine the risk level for each hazard.
- What is the probability of something going wrong?
- What are the consequences if something goes wrong?
- Prioritize the work at hand.
- Determine how to achieve your goal safely.