

American Association for Respiratory Care

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Position Statement

Hazardous Materials Exposure

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines a hazardous material as any substance or material in a quantity or form that poses an unreasonable risk to health, safety, and environment when transported. These materials are extremely hazardous to the community during an emergency spill, or release, as a result of their physical or chemical properties.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have classified emergency response and hospital personnel as high risk groups for exposure to infectious and toxic substances. Additionally, with the potential for attacks with weapons of mass destruction, pre-hospital and hospital healthcare workers have an increased risk of exposure to toxic, biological, and/or radioactive agents.

The AARC's Position

- The Respiratory Therapist, as well as all other healthcare professionals, must insure their personal safety before entering ANY hazardous situation.
- Respiratory Therapists must be knowledgeable in treating, reversing, and avoiding the effects of hazardous materials.
- Respiratory therapists must be alert to the potential effects of hazardous materials and be able to provide care to patients when needed.
- Respiratory therapists, while providing care, must assure that they do not become victims, or carriers, of the same entities that have harmed their patients. This can be accomplished through the use of personal protective equipment, isolation and decontamination procedures, and quarantine when recommended by professionals trained in hazardous materials incidents.
- The AARC supports efforts toward an epidemiological approach to the prevention of hazardous material exposure.
- The AARC supports the institutional development of appropriate hazardous material exposure guidelines that adhere to standards from both the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and The Joint Commission.
- The AARC encourages and endorses the inclusion and participation of respiratory therapists in the development of a community-wide plan for the management of exposure to hazardous materials.

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