

Building Productive Relationships with First Responders

In the event of an incident at your facility, a coordinated and effective emergency response plan is essential to limit the potential consequences of a fire, explosion, spill or other accident. Developing a relationship with local first responders, communicating your emergency plan and integrating their recommendations before an accident occurs are critical components to successful emergency response management.

Establishing a proactive and positive relationship between your retail facility, the Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs), and local responders will foster a better understanding of your facility and ensure that, in the event of an accident, first responders know how to approach your facility, reduce risk and limit the potential for more significant damage.

The following steps offer an avenue to development of a coordinated emergency response plan.



Extend an Invitation:

- Send invitations to local fire departments and LEPC members requesting them to tour your ag retail facility. This could be an invitation developed by ARA, or joint effort with first responders.

Review a Pre-Tour Checklist:

- Provide background information about products and services offered by ag retailers.
- Provide a one-page handout on how you handle chemicals.
- Discuss your fire prevention and emergency action plans for your retail site and chemical warehouses or storage facilities.
- Provide a site map indicating the recommended isolation zones and protective action zones, as recommended by the Department of Transportation (DOT).
- Communicate the level and type of training your employees have undergone.
- Address the alternatives to water such as ventilation and containment when responding to a fire or explosion at an ag retail facility.
- Describe what package pesticides are onsite, how they are handled and when they are stored in high and low volumes.
- Explain the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) is only a good reference document, if two or more products become mixed in a fire situation; there is no MSDS for mixes because there are too many variables, products and quantities.
- Address the safety and fire hazards associated with dry bulk pesticides, if applicable.
- Communicate the safety and fire hazards associated with bulk pesticides, if applicable.
- Discuss situations when first responders should take a defensive position, order an evacuation or let the fire burn out.
- Describe the safety and fire hazards associated with liquid fertilizers and dry fertilizers, if applicable.
- Review the safety and fire hazards associated with anhydrous ammonia (NH₃), if applicable. The following discussion points are recommended:
 - NH₃ Plant Leak procedures.
 - NH₃ nurse tank roll over.
 - NH₃ Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
 - Correct usage of water with NH₃ including a clear understanding about containing run-off if water is used.
 - No water on liquid or aerosol releases, only on vapor, **IF** absolutely needed.
- Relationship of pressure and temperature – venting vapor will cool liquid NH₃.
- Dynamics of the four types of release – aerosol stream, aerosol dense gas, vapor and liquid.
- Containment and control options such as using fans to back up responders as they tarp and cover.
- Rapid entry rescue methods.
- Proper methods of doing decontamination for vapor (fan) and for aerosol burns (full-body wash).
- Methods of moving away from an ammonia release – lateral and upwind.
- Benefits of shelter-in-place and inside safe refuge locations.
- Use of alternative mitigations (wet wash cloth/shower) to decontaminate/treat individuals exposed to ammonia.
- Review why and when, because of the nature of the products, sprinklers are not used in retail facilities (e.g. reacting with water, storm water contamination).
- Ensure emergency/cell phone numbers of ag retailer, site maps, and first-in response recommendations are clearly posted at plant entrances.

Touring the Ag Retail Facility:

- Point out fire hydrant locations, storm sewer drains, surface water direction flow, etc.
- Assist first responders in understanding the layout of buildings.
- Inform about construction type and building materials used [steel, wood, concrete roofing material, etc.].
- Find and mark locations of electrical disconnects, natural gas or liquid propane shut-offs.
- Share information about products stored in each building.
- Determine which buildings house particular chemicals, grains and equipment
- Check for physical hazards in the area.
- Ask for ideas on correcting any potential fire hazards.
- Determine prevailing wind direction and downwind life safety and environmental concerns.
- Determine the best response routes and first responder meeting point(s).

Post-Tour:

- Ask first responders for any suggestions on how your ag retail facility could be safer and when they can get together again.