

## Safety Considerations and Weapons of Mass Destruction

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While we like to think that we live in a region where such incidents are unlikely, it must be realized that we do have a risk for WMD events anywhere and that they have already occurred in the past. Incidents involving bomb scares and even pipe bombs, supposedly contaminated mail scares, and others have occurred in this region in recent years. Individuals and groups often perform these acts for publicity or to gain an objective known only to them. Recent events have also led us to expect the use of chemical and biological weapons as well as the use of nuclear "dirty bombs" which can contaminate areas with radioactivity and can be of a relatively small size unlike atomic bombs of yesteryear. Purchases of plastic sheeting and duct tape from department stores of late also reflect the fact that people are starting to get the message about planning for shelter-in-place options in case of chemical weapons releases. Let's discuss a few points to help you stay safe if you find you are in an area where a suspected event is taking place.

Let's say you are shopping or driving along and need to stop and use a pay phone. Perhaps you see a device or segment of PVC pipe next to the phone. Do you assume it is a prank and use the phone anyway? What if you are at a building where several people suddenly become ill or collapse, what should you do? In our first example, the telephone, there is obviously something wrong. Don't bet on it being a 'dud'. Back off, keep others away and summon the authorities. Be mindful that radio waves may detonate the device.

Our second example brings to mind an incident that I personally witnessed many years ago. The workers in a store were all suddenly stricken with a violent headache and blurred vision. I responded with several others to the scene and in spite of the comments made by others, and myself that the initial entry team should wear breathing apparatus, the crew walked in with no protection and sure enough, in 5 minutes time, THEY were now victims. Turned out that a chemical was leaking in the store, which created the problem. The second crew in, who wore SCBA's, later found it. The moral of this story is: "Without proper protection, do not enter a situation without knowing what you are walking into." Watch for indicators at any possible haz-mat and/or WMD locations.

- Look for physical indications and outward warning signs.
- Unusual smoke, odors, vapor clouds.
- Dead animals or vegetation.
- Mass Casualties may or may not show outward signs of trauma.
- Victims with breathing difficulties. May or may not have blistered, or reddening skin and eye irritations etc.

For the untrained: do not approach, touch or examine devices, debris or victims. Stay upwind at a reasonable distance and summon aid. If you suspect that you may be contaminated, do not leave the area and go home. If you are, this would only endanger others and your families. Alert responders that you may be contaminated and follow through with any requested procedures until cleared to go.

Be mindful that many incidents are 'staged' to draw in responders for a later release of a secondary device or 'booby trap'. The true targets may well be the responders and the initial victims may be considered only as 'collateral damage' by the perpetrator(s). Secondary devices may be as bad or worse than the initial incident! People who do these types of things do not think like the average person on the street. The whole objective may be to 'take out' as many people as possible and by drawing in several responders and the inevitable gawkers close to a location; they may indeed have worse surprises. Stay out and let those with more training do the work.

Lastly, if you receive an EAS warning to "shelter-in-place" for a chemical release, would you know what to do and do you have the right materials handy to do it with? If advised to "shelter-in-place", immediately turn off all sources of outside ventilation and close all windows and doors.

Keep your portable radio with you. Move to a 'safe room' in your home or work place. (When planning ahead for a safe room, try to locate one with at least ten feet of floor space per person to allow for adequate air space and preferably without windows.) Seal around the doors, vents and any windows with plastic sheeting (this can be pre-measured and cut to fit and marked well beforehand) and duct tape. Stay there until the all clear is given. In all likelihood, the chemical cloud will soon pass over and dissipate. Chemical agents do not linger long in the open air. A few hours (2-5) will likely be adequate for the winds to blow them away. After the all clear is given, open windows and doors and allow fresh air to remove any residual chemical vapors. If you are outdoors when an alert is given and you have no available shelter, try to stay upwind and move away from the affected area. Listen for and follow any other EAS instructions you receive over your portable receiver.

Lastly, Consider any possible WMD site as a crime scene! Anyone who has ever watched a TV detective show or two has at least a minimal idea of the need for scene integrity and evidence preservation. If an event has occurred and you are not in the area, do not rush to the scene! As amateur radio operators involved in ARES and RACES efforts we may be asked to help with communications during the course of the event, however, never take it upon yourself to go to a possible WMD scene just to see what you can find out. This is not only foolhardy; it can be deadly! If you are requested to activate by EM or another served agency, do as they ask to the extent of your training. Do not put yourself into locations in which you are not asked, equipped and cleared to enter.

Source: Kentucky Amateur Radio Web Site – [www.kyham.net](http://www.kyham.net)