



HEALTH & SAFETY ALERT

Chemical or Detergent Suicides



IMPORTANT HEALTH, SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Date: 21 April 2010

Issue Number: 01/2010

Detergent suicide is a newer method of committing suicide that appears to be gaining in popularity in the United States and Japan. It is believed that there are **no known cases yet** in the United Kingdom, but there is a lot of information about this method on the Internet.

One method that appears to be on the rise is the use of common household chemicals to make a lethal gaseous combination. This combination of ingredients yields Hydrogen Sulphide Gas (H₂S). This new method can clearly be traced back to Japan. At least 500 Japanese men, women and children took their lives in the first half of 2008 by following instructions posted on Japanese websites, which describe how to mix bath sulphur with toilet bowl cleaner to create a poisonous gas. The method has been able to gain popularity due to the Internet. There have now been a number of cases in North America.

Police, Fire, and Ambulance should be aware that these suicides typically take place in a confined space like a vehicle, cupboard, small room, toilet, or small bathroom. The subject usually places the chemicals in the bucket and mixes the combination together. As the mixture is combined it releases the Hydrogen Sulphide Gas. In some cases the subject places bio-hazard signs around the vehicle to warn responders. Subjects have also placed duct tape or similar material around the windows and vents to contain the gas.

Hydrogen Sulphide

- Toxic gas
- Usually encountered in confined space rescue
- Colourless gas
- Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) level of 100 parts-per-million
- Risk Phrase R12 Extremely flammable.
- Risk Phrase R26 Very toxic by inhalation.

At 700 ppm just 2-3 breaths can cause immediate death

Typical Chemicals Used

Acid Sources

Muriatic acid
Sulphuric acid
Lysol disinfectant
Lysol toilet bowl cleaner
Some toilet bowl cleaners
Kaboom Shower, Tub and Tile cleaner
Tile and Stone cleaners

Sulphur Sources

Artist oil paints
Dandruff shampoos
Pesticides
Spackling paste
Latex paints
Garden fungicides
Lime Sulphur

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Warning Signs / Vehicle

- Subject appears unconscious and unresponsive.
- Tape over vents and windows.
- Suicide note.
- A posted note to warn rescuers of present danger.
- Bucket, pail, pot or coolbox in the vehicle containing chemicals.
- Empty containers of chemicals in or around the vehicle.
- Smell of rotten eggs.



Response to Detergent Suicide in a vehicle

- Survey the scene.
- Survey the inside of the vehicle.
- Determine responsiveness of subject:
 - conscious or unconscious
 - Appears to be breathing – chest rise and fall
- If the subject is conscious can they open the door and exit the vehicle? Have the subject walk/crawl away from vehicle to fresh air. Be careful when dealing with the patient due to the gas being released from the patient's clothing and exhaled breaths.
- If the subject is unconscious and does not respond to attempts to rouse them without breaking the window or opening the doors, ensure that the Fire Service and Ambulance have been called and **back away from the vehicle**, stopping anyone else approaching. Put a cordon in place.
- If approach is required, wear the correct PPE to prevent inadvertent inhalation of gas. Also skin and eye contamination may result in localised adverse health effects.

Response to a detergent suicide in a dwelling

- Any outward visual signs as you approach the residence or building.
- Signs posted on the front of the house.
- Other persons from inside the house complaining of difficulty breathing.
- The smell of rotten eggs or sewer gas in the area and gets stronger as you approach the target residence.
- Do not enter any confined space which is apparently contaminated with this gas.
- Be prepared to evacuate the residence or apartment building.

Public Health Response

- Inform ambulance service of potential contamination hazard.
- Inform Health Protection Agency of contamination (01476 514699).
- Ensure thorough decontamination organised where environmental contamination is suspected.

If there are any further questions regarding this issue then please contact Nick Cornwell-Smith, Force H&S Adviser.

THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICE, POLICE HEADQUARTERS, NETTLEHAM, LINCOLN:
Telephone 01522 55 (8043)