
Safety First: Shelter in Place

The world today, even our local area, has danger and risk factors requiring clear accurate thinking and action. Shelter in place is a protection tool of great value in the case of hazardous materials accidents, random shooters and weather events. The goal is to minimize the exposure to the threat. Let's focus on a roadway chemical spill. Using the home as a temporary barrier provides protection of the indoor atmosphere. Sealing doors and shutting windows increases the protection. Even if some of the hazardous material seeps in the level will be far less than the exposed outside area until help can arrive and direct you otherwise. Make sure family members, guests and even walkers on the street move into the closed house and keep it closed as long as is necessary.

Tests conducted on air exchange rates for homes show air exchange rates for homes of 0.16 to 0.31 per hour and mobile homes a bit higher at 0.47 per hour. The one-half of one percent or less exchange rate is further enhanced by two factors. Further reductions result from moving into and closing inside rooms like bathrooms, closets, and dens. Homes in the tests also showed additional safety factors in that cracks and pores in homes also act as a filter to absorb chemicals and further reduce temporary exposure.

It is always important to follow the instructions and respond to the officer in charge of the incident from the local fire department or department Haz-Mat team. We are fortunate in Gage County and Beatrice to be the home base of the Southeast Nebraska Haz-Mat team at the Beatrice Fire Department.

When we look at potential dangers in our community we need to have situational awareness. Use our senses to make observations and comprehend the meaning of those observations. Think about what we are seeing, make anticipatory decisions. Defensive driving techniques are a great training ground. They have saved me from numerous incidents just getting to work everyday. We need to scan our environment and gather information continuously (watch for the red car that usually runs the stop sign on Ashland Avenue). We need to be aware and react to new information (the SCC student late for class accelerating on West Court Street). Decide on safest options and act in a timely fashion (if they are already in the center turn lane and coming fast, pull to the right, slow down and let them go, better option and getting rammed).

Factors which really reduce awareness include tunnel vision. Driving without ever looking at intersections, or events outside the roadway like a construction project, harvest season, or cattle on the roadside. I recently had a person who drives to Lincoln every day for work, ask me where the new hospital was being constructed, that's tunnel vision. Preoccupation with work, headphones, cell phones, texting, reading, watching videos, eating lunch, and intense conversations all take away from the process of awareness, process and action.

The survival sequence moves from denial (or no conception that anything like this could happen), to deliberation, decision making, to action. The most critical factor is moving by the denial stage without delay.

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