

EMERGENCY RESPONSE REVIEW

Cochran Chemical Fire
Wewoka, Oklahoma

FINAL REPORT :: NOVEMBER 1, 2004



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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 is issuing this Emergency Response Review as part of its ongoing effort to protect human health and the environment by responding effectively to chemical accidents.

Emergency Response Reviews are designed to:

- Review with a local community and state officials the response procedures and outcomes to a specific chemical accident, affecting that community;
- Share information about chemical response safety practices;
- Develop potential recommendations and lessons learned to more effectively respond to an accidental release in the future;
- Build cooperation among local, state, and federal government agencies.

Emergency Response Reviews are entirely voluntary and may include all local, state, and federal entities involved with the response, as well as the responsible party and their representatives.

This document does not substitute for EPA's regulations, nor is it a regulation itself. It cannot impose legally binding requirements on EPA, states, or the regulated community, and may not apply to a particular situation based upon circumstances. This guidance does not represent final agency action, and may change in the future, as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF INCIDENT

On Wednesday, July 21, 2004, at approximately 2:28 p.m., a fire started in at Cochran Chemical Company, which provides stock and blended chemicals for the oil drilling business. Initial investigation believe a spark ignited vapors during a mixing process, but the exact cause is not addressed within this report.

The Wewoka Fire Department received the fire call at approximately 2:28 and immediately responded to the facility to begin fire fighting operations. Mutual aid support was provided by the Seminole Fire Department.

Upon arrival, the fire department was met by representative of Cochran Chemical, who provided Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) on all the chemicals present on-site. The Fire Department reviewed these documents to determine the most effective and safe method for entry to the facility and response tactics.

Streets around the business were closed during the fire fighting operation, as well as several residents evacuated from their homes as a precaution until the fire was extinguished. Approximately 450,000 gallons of water was used to extinguish the fire, and was bermed and collected to prevent run-off.

Representatives from the State Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) oversaw the response and remediation efforts.

Traffic restrictions and residential evacuations were lifted later in the evening after the fire was extinguished.

On August 11, EPA Region 6 invited state and local organizations involved in the response to come together as a group and discuss the strengths and key issues surrounding the response. This report is a result of that meeting.

OBSERVATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Observation # 1</p>	<p>EPA Region 6 commends the efforts made by all responders in fighting this fire in a effective and safe manner. Throughout the response, numerous local responders displayed professionalism in their efforts. Entities agreed that the response went smoothly and efficiently. All responders were properly trained in hazardous materials, and proper safety procedures were ensured.</p>
<p>Recommendation # 1</p>	<p>All local response organizations should review their response protocols based on the following:</p> <p>“Response teams to a disaster scene have a responsibility to first protect themselves and their team members. If you or your team is injured, not only are the number of victims increased, but the response is now delayed, resulting in additional resource utilization. This delay and need for additional resources due to your inability to keep yourself and your team protected could cost other victims their lives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DISASTER Paradigm: Safety and Security</p> <p>Don't be selfish - protect yourself. Scene priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Protect yourself and your team members first ● Protect the public ● Protect the patients ● Protect the environment <p>Once your team has safely entered the scene, focus on protecting the public ...”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>"Basic Disaster Life Support Manual, Version 2.5"</u></p> <p>A first responder's first duty at any incident is safety. This issue is always paramount. When a responder is injured, they become part of the problem, instead of a solution to the problem. Never should any responder unnecessarily risk their lives. Individuals become emergency responders to help other individuals and their communities, safely and efficiently.</p>

Observation # 2	Before the fire, the facility had not filed the Tier II Chemical Inventory reports with the LEPC, SERC, and local fire departments. This was resolved shortly after the fire, and the facility is now in compliance. If the facility had not been able to provide the fire department with immediate access to the MSDSs, the response would have been negatively impacted.
Recommendation # 2	All local communities should take opportunities to work with facilities within their jurisdiction in complying with the provisions of the Right-to-Know programs (i.e., fire code inspections, pre-planning visits, other community projects).
Observation / Recommendation # 3	All response / planning organizations within Seminole County should meet to determine the need and effectiveness to re-invigorate an LEPC within the County.
Observation # 4	The Wewoka Fire Chief Anderson performed as Incident Commander (IC) during the incident, as well as the Public Information Officer (PIO). Chief Anderson is to be commended for his effective leadership during this response. All response personnel agreed that the response was handled effectively and safely, and that incident command was established promptly and carried out efficiently. Specifically, all personnel believed that various agencies (fire, law enforcement, emergency management) coordinated the response in a timely and safe manner.
Recommendation # 4	EPA Region 6 would recommend that Chief Anderson involve more staff in the lesser activities during a response, so that he is not overwhelmed with response actions. This would include appointing a PIO to handle media inquiries and interviews during the emergency response. Seminole County may consider requesting the PIO from the school district (or other local entity with a PIO) be available to assist during emergency situations.
Observation / Recommendation # 5	Local governments that respond to hazardous materials emergencies should always be aware of the potential for reimbursement under the Local Government Reimbursement program, operated through EPA. Seminole County and the local communities are aware of the program, and will avail themselves of the program as appropriate.
Observation / Recommendation # 6	All local response officials should be familiar with the technical support and assistance available through their State and EPA Region 6 during a hazardous materials incident or oil spill. The State of Oklahoma has a 24-emergency number: 800-522-0206; EPA Region 6 24-hour number: 866-372-7745.
Observation / Recommendation # 7	Health and safety should always be the number one priority during an emergency response. During this response, safety protocols and procedures were followed. EPA recommends that a specifically-designated Health and Safety Officer should always be appointed to oversee the overall response.

Each of the emergency response reviews conducted within Region 6 show one consistent pattern: Emergency response personnel within Region 6 are be commended for their professionalism and sincere desire to protect the citizens of their communities. Region 6 EPA is grateful for the efforts made by all emergency response personnel, and hopes the above recommendations can be used to improve the response and preparedness readiness of a community, if a future emergency occurs.