

EMERGENCY RESPONSE REVIEW

Hughitt's Sawmill Fire
Tolar, Texas

FINAL REPORT :: NOVEMBER 9, 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 Friday, July 9, 2004, at approximately 5:00 a.m., a fire started in a wood scrap / waste stockpile at the Hughitt Sawmill site, approximately 3/4 mile west of Tolar, Hood County, Texas. The exact cause of the fire is still under investigation by the Hood County Fire Marshal's Office, which is not addressed within this report.

The Tolar Volunteer Fire Department and Hood County Fire Marshal's Office originally responded to the fire. Additional units were called in for assistance from the Grandbury VFD, North Hood County VFD, and Indian Harbor VFD.

Highway 377 was closed by Texas DOT to all traffic due to smoke and the amount of response vehicle traffic. Water was shuttled in from the Town of Tolar, City of Grandbury, and Lake Grandbury. Approximately 250,000

gallons of water, along with approximately 800-850 gallons of foam, were used to extinguish the fire. Several other fire departments provided mutual aid in shuttling water to the scene and other fire-fighting support.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) initiated a State-funded response later in the morning, due to the threat posed by the continuation of fire, strain on local firefighting assets, and an inability of the owner / operator to provide assistance. Jim Kerlin, TCEQ Region 4, provided valuable assistance to the local officials, and directed the activities of the State contractor.

The State contractor, AMX Environmental, responded to the incident, and worked with local response personnel to extinguish the fire at approximately 09:30 pm on Friday. AMX's primary purpose was to operate water and foam hoses and heavy equipment in the immediate fire zone, as well as pulling apart and extinguishing burning piles.

EPA Region 6 monitored for contaminants of the plume moving from the southeast. Readings of 15 - 25 ppm of volatile organic compounds were detected using a TVA 1000 within the plume. A portable gas chromatograph mass spectrometer (GCMS) HAPSITE was also used to test for BTEX and other volatiles within the plume, with no detectable results noticed.

Additionally, under the direction of the EPA, the ASPECT aircraft flew over the plume, monitoring for contaminants. Small amounts of VOCs were detected by the aircraft within the plume.

During the early afternoon, EPA advised the Incident Commander (Hood County Fire Marshal) to issue a voluntary evacuation advisory for residents just north of the facility impacted by the plume. The Hood County Red Cross established a shelter for anyone needing assistance. No residents evacuated to the shelter.

Highway 377 was reopened to traffic at approximately 11:30 pm.

During the following day (07/10/04), the TCEQ and AMX conducted additional site activities, including reinforcement of the containment berm on the east side of the property, dismantling of remaining wood piles to prevent additional fires, and repair of broken water pipes during the fire response.

On August 26, 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. A list of attendees is attached to this report.

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.</p> <p>Throughout the response, numerous local responders displayed professionalism in their efforts, as well as a sincere effort to assist trapped and wounded citizens.</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 ...” <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>
<p>Observation / Recommendation # 2</p>	<p>All response / planning organizations within Hood County should meet to determine the need and effectiveness to re-invigorate an LEPC within the County.</p>
<p>Observation # 3</p>	<p>Hood County Fire Marshal Deeds performed as Incident Commander (IC) during the incident, as well as the Public Information Officer (PIO). Chief Deeds is to be commended for his effective leadership during this response. His tireless efforts calmed the community, while ensuring that personnel responded safely and efficiently to the fire.</p>
<p>Recommendation # 3</p>	<p>EPA Region 6 would recommend that Chief Deeds 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. Hood County may consider requesting the PIO from the school district be available to assist during emergency situations.</p>
<p>Observation # 4</p>	<p>Even after the highway was closed to through traffic, several residents and other non-response individuals were able to circumvent road blocks and drive through the fire plume.</p>

Recommendation # 4	Community response personnel must ensure that all non-response personnel are prevented from driving through restricted areas. This not only protects the citizens, but provides better safety for response personnel.
Observation # 5	The designated Health & Safety Officer also did an excellent job in monitoring response personnel to ensure that no one was injured during the response. However, in a few instances, personnel entering the hot zone did so without the proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
Recommendation # 5	The Health & Safety Officer has the responsibility to ensure that all responders entering the hot zone do so in a safe manner. The H&S Officer should disallow response efforts by anyone (including state, federal, or private responders) who do not follow safe protocols during the response.
Observation # 6	During the review, some of the local responders indicated they felt intimidated by the federal and state officials (concerned state/federal officials might take over response and exclude local personnel).
Recommendation # 6	State and Federal officials, when responding to an emergency, need to ensure that all officials understand our role – assistance to local officials in ensuring a safe and effective response. Neither the State or Federal government desire “taking over an incident.”
Observation # 7	During the incident, no formal command post had been established.
Recommendation # 7	EPA Region 6 recommends that a command post be established during a large response, such as this. That command post should be centralized and manned continuously, so that all incoming response personnel and other logistical support will have a gathering point. Additionally, this provides a central area for individuals to receive assignments, report and to gather information, and eliminate duplication of efforts and reduce confusion at the incident.
Recommendation # 8	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. Hood County and the local communities are aware of the program, and will avail themselves of the program as appropriate.
Observation # 8	Information concerning air monitoring results were not timely provided to all response officials determining appropriate response actions.
Recommendation # 8	All parties need to ensure that vital information is shared between response officials so that response actions may be determined in the most timely manner. This includes information gathered by State / Federal organizations, such as air monitoring data.

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.

Emergency Response Review (August 26, 2004) Attendees

Terry Green	Granbury Volunteer Fire Department
David Cline	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Jay Larance	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Mike Bell	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Charles Baskett	Hood County Commissioner
Roger Deeds	Hood County Fire Marshal
Andy Rash	Hood County Judge
Ray Wilson	Tolar Volunteer Fire Department
Adrian Garcia	Hood County Fire Marshal's Office
Paul Painter	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Rusty Kamenicky	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Kenneth Bell	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Lee Wacassy	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department
Larry Ingram	Cresson
Joe Martinez	TCEQ Emergency Response
Matt Huttsell	Tolar Volunteer Fire Department
Ty McKee	AMX Environmental
Dallas Purvis	North Hood County Volunteer Fire Department