

Chemical Spills: The First Five Minutes

About 9 minutes to deliver

The decision that matters is whether this is yours to clean up at all — and most people decide wrong, quickly, with a mop.

Somebody knocks over a drum. In the next five minutes it either stays a mess or becomes an incident, and the difference is one decision.

INCIDENTAL OR EMERGENCY?

This is the question 1910.120 turns on, and it decides everything else.

Incidental — small, a material you know, in an area you control, no significant health or fire risk, and it can be safely cleaned by people in the area with what is on hand. A gallon of hydraulic oil on a shop floor.

Emergency — anything else. It is an emergency spill if any of these are true:

- you do not know what it is,
- it is big, spreading, or heading for a drain, a watercourse or a confined space,
- it is flammable, corrosive, or giving off vapour or fumes,
- it needs a respirator or PPE you do not have on you,
- somebody has been exposed or hurt,
- you are not sure.

"Not sure" is an emergency. Cleaning up an emergency spill without training and equipment is how a spill becomes a casualty.

IF IT IS AN EMERGENCY

- Get out and take people with you. Uphill and upwind.
- Isolate. Close the door, rope it off, keep everyone back.
- Eliminate ignition sources if you can do that on the way out — no switches, no engines, no phones near vapour.
- Call it in. Say what, roughly how much, where, and whether anyone is exposed.
- Find the SDS and have it ready for whoever responds. Section 6 is the spill section.

IF IT IS GENUINELY INCIDENTAL

- Read the SDS first — sections 6, 7 and 8: spill measures, handling, and the PPE you actually need.
- Gloves that resist that chemical. Nitrile is not universal. The SDS names the material.
- Stop the source, then contain the edges with absorbent before you touch the middle.
- Never hose it down or wash it to a drain. That converts a bucket of waste into a reportable discharge.
- Bag the waste as hazardous and label it. Contaminated absorbent is not general rubbish.

ON SKIN OR IN EYES

Flush immediately, fifteen minutes, and get medical attention. 1910.151(c) requires drenching or flushing facilities within the work area wherever corrosives are used. Know where yours is before you need it with your eyes shut.

ASK THE CREW

- What is the worst thing that could spill on this site, and would we call that incidental?
- Where is the spill kit, and has anyone checked what is in it?
- Where is the nearest eyewash, and how long does it take to get there blind?

29 CFR 1910.120 · 29 CFR 1910.1200 · 29 CFR 1910.151

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Chemical Spills: The First Five Minutes

About 9 minutes to deliver · 29 CFR 1910.120 · 29 CFR 1910.1200 · 29 CFR 1910.151

Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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