

INTRODUCTION TO LEPC MEMBERSHIP

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN LEPC MEMBER

As an LEPC member, you are part of a broad-based collaborative effort to prepare your planning district to respond to emergencies and incidents involving hazardous materials as well as any other hazard, or emergency to which your area may be prone.

Although LEPCs were originally established to deal strictly with chemical hazards, since catastrophic events such as 9/11 and Katrina, there has been a transition from the federal level down to the local level for LEPCs to become involved in “all-hazard” issues.

An LEPC has many duties, challenges and responsibilities and as a member, the more you understand what an LEPC is and what it is supposed to do, the better for you, your LEPC and the public it serves.

Unlike many other environmental laws that often sets up those with a stake in the outcome of decisions as adversaries, EPCRA encourages those who have a stake in the outcomes, to work together to solve problems. Everyone needs to understand that planning for emergencies is never a finished task. Dwight Eisenhower put it best when he said, “Planning is more important than the plan”.

Typically, LEPCs do not directly respond to emergencies. Rather, LEPCs are tasked with ensuring the broad issues of planning for response to a chemical incident or other disaster has occurred. LEPCs deal with topics such as, identifying in advance, what the different response entities will do during a response, assisting with arranging the appropriate training, equipment and drills, educating the public and many other pieces of the emergency planning puzzle.

EPCRA AND THE ROLE OF LEPCs

LEPCs consist of stakeholders working in a collaborative way to process and utilize the data that is provided under EPCRA to create, or validate regional emergency response plans. The EPCRA law encourages state and local governments to expand emergency planning requirements by creating laws tailored to their own states and localities to complement the federal requirements. EPCRA allows for great flexibility in how it is implemented on the local level, as emergency planning scenarios are different and somewhat unique in each community.

Part of the role of an LEPC is to form partnerships with local governments, communities, academia and industries as a resource for enhancing hazardous materials preparedness and with these partnerships in place are ready to help address “all-hazards” as well.

Local governments, emergency planners, and responders are responsible for the integration of emergency planning and response within their jurisdiction. This includes ensuring the local hazard analysis adequately addresses HazMat incidents; incorporating planning for HazMat incidents into the local emergency management plan and annexes; assessing capabilities and developing HazMat response capability using local resources, mutual aid and contractors; training responders and exercising the plan.

EPCRA's emergency planning provisions are designed to promote the discovery and mitigation of risks associated with chemical use. To reduce risks, prevention, preparedness and quick response to chemical emergencies are best. If properly executed, these three measures can make the difference between disaster and inconvenience.

Prevention involves identifying the causes of and reducing the potential for chemical accidents to occur. Proper safety measures, sound management practices, and preventive maintenance all reduce the potential for chemical accidents. However, it should be noted that no chemical safety management program can be guaranteed 100 percent effective.

Preparedness involves anticipating accidents that may occur despite prevention measures and developing contingency or emergency response plans. Emergency response plans help facilities and local and state governments respond to accidents quickly and efficiently. These plans outline the procedures a facility and the community should follow in responding to a release. When accidents occur, it is imperative that the various players in the response process know their roles, as well as the roles of other responders and use their resources wisely.

The **Emergency Planning Process** has a greater impact than the plan itself, encouraging awareness, communication, and coordination of efforts.
