



OREGON

Kate Brown, Governor

Oregon State Police
Office of State Fire Marshal

3565 Trelstad Ave. SE

Salem, OR 97317-9614

503-934-8217

Fax 503-373-1825

E-mail: rudy.owens@osp.oregon.gov

www.oregon.gov/osp/sfm

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Contact: Rudy Owens, 503-934-8217 (office) or 971-332-0052 (cell)

Office of State Fire Marshal Programs Promote Hazardous Materials Safety for Oregonians

The Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal, along with countries and organizations around the world, offers condolences to the people of Beirut, Lebanon following the deadly blast in the city's port on Aug. 4 that claimed more than 220 lives and injured thousands. At least 10 Beirut firefighters are among the missing.

As Lebanese authorities conduct their investigation, it is widely reported the incident involved the explosion of a large quantity of ammonium nitrate stored in a port warehouse. The United States uses millions of tons of the substance annually in products like fertilizer. While the commonly used material is stable at ambient temperature and pressure, it may explode when exposed to a strong shock or when subjected to sustained high temperatures in confinement.

While accidental explosions of ammonium nitrate are rare in the United States, an accident in 1947 at Galveston Bay, Texas, claimed 581 lives when a ship carrying the material ignited in the harbor. In 2013 in West, Texas, an explosion at a facility killed 15 people — 12 who were first responders — and injured more than 260 others, which the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board determined was caused by the inadequate storage and handling of ammonium nitrate.

Some Oregonians may remember the [Roseburg Blast of 1959](#) when a building fire ignited a truck carrying ammonium nitrate and dynamite, resulting in a blast that destroyed eight city blocks.

"The explosion in Beirut was a horrible event, harming thousands of people, first responders and the entire nation," said State Fire Marshal Jim Walker. "The event also serves as a reminder that the state and our local responders prioritize the safety of all Oregonians and have programs that mitigate risk, respond to incidents and work with communities to protect residents from hazardous materials."

The OSFM administers several programs as part of its mission to protect citizens, their property and the environment from fire and hazardous materials.

- **Community Right to Know (CR2K):** The CR2K program maintains a public database of reportable hazardous materials statewide. This provides emergency planners, first responders, health professionals and the public information on hazardous materials so measures can be taken to protect all residents and plan for potential accidents. Information is managed through an online system that can be accessed 24/7, with current technical information on more than 13,000 facilities in Oregon. In addition, CR2K compliance staff also conducted nearly 900 onsite inspections in 2019, to help ensure correct reporting and compliance with reporting rules.
- **State Emergency Response Commission (SERC):** Under state law, OSFM is designated as Oregon's SERC, which coordinates hazardous emergency response planning with industry, law enforcement, health, tribal and other local and county stakeholders.

- **Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs):** As the SERC, the OSFM facilitates local community planning and public engagement around a community's right to know about hazardous materials in their communities through LEPCs. There are numerous LEPCs across Oregon who work to improve chemical release preparedness to help protect the public, the environment and emergency responders.
- **Regional Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Teams (RHMERT):** The OSFM funds and supports 13 teams to respond to hazardous materials emergency incidents that exceed the resources of local jurisdictions. Teams are comprised of local firefighters, law enforcement officials and public works personnel who receive 160 hours of specialized training to provide different levels of hazardous materials response to incidents such as petrochemical highway spills, as well as supporting response partners at biological, radiological and explosive incidents. The teams also provide training to local responders and industry to ensure communities are prepared to respond to a hazardous materials incident.
- **HazMat by Rail Program:** The program is a partnership with the railroad industry to assist local communities with training and planning for transportation by rail incidents involving hazardous materials. Program funding supports rail response plans, training exercises and response equipment across Oregon.
- **Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) Grant:** The OSFM receives and disburses federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration grant funds — approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000 each year — to Oregon communities for local hazardous materials transportation planning, training and exercise projects. During the last three years, the funding has supported the creation of 12 local emergency response plans, 10 tabletop exercises and other exercises.

Additional information about the OSFM's hazardous response, planning and preparedness programs can be found on the [OSFM website](#). Highlights of the programs' activities for 2019 are available in the OSFM's [annual report for 2019](#).

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