

## Office of Emergency Response

This office is Rhode Island's first line of defense in protecting public health, safety, and welfare in an environmental emergency. Like police and fire fighters, DEM's emergency responders are prepared to handle incidents of great variety - everything from a spill of a few gallons to a whole tanker-full of petroleum, from a single abandoned drum to biological and chemical weapons. Highly trained first responders are on-call 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

These responders spend the bulk of their time remediating a stream of manageable mishaps that could otherwise pose a significant danger. Nearly every day of every year, despite preventive measures, hundreds of incidents threaten the public as well as the environment. Emergency responders are prepared to limit the risks from oil and chemical spills, failed tanks or pipes, fires or fumes, overturned trucks, sunken vessels, litter, WMD (weapons of mass destruction), abandoned drums, and the like.

The goal of responders is to assess, contain, and remediate environmental incidents. Their first job is to secure the site, to minimize the risk to the public and the environment. They then aim to remove the source of the risk, with minimal cost to the taxpayer. Normally the most effective approach is to work cooperatively with the responsible party (the RP), the person whose action or property is the source of an environmental threat. The RP is legally and financially responsible for damages, including the cost of containment, cleanup, and restoration to State standards. DEM Emergency Responders will provide technical assistance. They can help find and supervise appropriate contractors, monitor and interpret conditions, review sampling and remediation plans, and provide coordination with other state, local, and federal agencies

that are concerned. In some cases (for example, if the RP is unknown, absent, or uncooperative) responders may mitigate the site on their own. In all of these efforts, DEM Emergency Responders aim to protect the safety, health, and welfare of the public and the environment.

This Office of Emergency Response responds to more than 900 incidents each year, but only a tiny fraction grab headlines. So Rhode Islanders might easily underestimate how many incidents start with ordinary events around the home. A small spill or a bit of improperly disposed waste may seem innocuous, but it can result in calamity, fouling a whole neighborhood or a watershed. These mishaps often plague citizens who think of themselves as "unlucky." But they also could have been more careful in the first place.

## Preventing Environmental Emergencies

Most ordinary citizens have a supply of diverse chemicals and materials around the house. Considered collectively, they represent a massive storehouse. Sooner or later - in Rhode Island, just about every day - hazardous releases are bound to occur.

Since individuals are less regulated than businesses, they might easily forget that they are similarly liable for environmental damages. For example, among the most frequent mishaps in Rhode Island are spills of home heating oil. It is a desirable fuel and an "organic" compound, but heating oil also contains caustic, flammable, and toxic components. Whether because of a deliverer's lapse of attention or defective equipment, whether beside or in the home, responsibility for a spill falls on the homeowner. Residue can leach from a yard or basement and spread through groundwater, fouling wells far

away. Few homeowners know that insurance policies often exclude coverage for damage and cleanup. The bill for an overflow during delivery or a couple of weeks of a "small" leak can range from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars. Likewise, a bit of improperly disposed waste - solvent, paint, old fuel or engine oil, a bit of junk material - can both wreak havoc on the environment and draw a fine or civil suit.

Bottom line: the environment, DEM, and ordinary citizens share a profound, direct interest in preventing such mishaps.

## RI Department of Environmental Emergency Response Planning

Department emergency support, including Incident Command Structures (ICS), resources, and response plans keyed to particular sorts of threats can be view on our website at [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov). Click on the "Emergency Response" link then click on "Emergency Response Plan". Below is a list of the plans you can choose that appear under Section 6.

[Hazardous Materials/Environmental Protection Plan](#)

[Oil Spill Plan](#)

[Fish And Wildlife Incidents In Rhode Island Waters](#)

[Fish Kill Plan](#)

[Hurricane Plan](#)

[Prescribed Fire Plan](#)

[Emergency Response Procedures on State Beaches](#)

[Animal Disaster / Animal Care Plan](#)

[Animal Disease Plan](#)

[Mosquito-Borne Zoonotic Disease Plan](#)

[Radiological Emergency Ingestion Exposure Pathway Plan](#)

[Drought Plan](#)

[Plant Health Emergency Management Plan](#)