

FIRE AND SPILL CONTROL

FIRE CONTROL

Water is the most common and generally most available fire extinguishing agent. Exercise caution in selecting a fire extinguishing method since there are many factors to be considered in an incident. Water may be ineffective in fighting fires involving some materials; its effectiveness depends greatly on the method of application.

Fires involving a spill of flammable liquids are generally controlled by applying a fire fighting foam to the surface of the burning material. Fighting flammable liquid fires requires foam concentrate which is chemically compatible with the burning material, correct mixing of the foam concentrate with water and air, and careful application and maintenance of the foam blanket. There are two general types of fire fighting foam: regular and alcohol-resistant. Examples of regular foam are protein-base, fluoroprotein, and aqueous film forming foam (AFFF). Some flammable liquids, including many petroleum products, can be controlled by applying regular foam. Other flammable liquids, including polar solvents (flammable liquids which are water soluble) such as alcohols and ketones, have different chemical properties. A fire involving these materials cannot be easily controlled with regular foam and requires application of alcohol-resistant foam. Polar-solvent fires may be difficult to control and require a higher foam application rate than other flammable liquid fires (see NFPA/ANSI Standards 11 and 11A for further information). Refer to the appropriate guide to determine which type of foam is recommended. Although it is impossible to make specific recommendations for flammable liquids which have subsidiary corrosive or toxic hazards, alcohol-resistant foam may be effective for many of these materials. The emergency response telephone number on the shipping document, or the appropriate emergency response agency, should be contacted as soon as possible for guidance on the proper fire extinguishing agent to use. The final selection of the agent and method depends on many factors such as incident location, exposure hazards, size of the fire, environmental concerns, as well as the availability of extinguishing agents and equipment at the scene.

WATER REACTIVE MATERIALS

Water is sometimes used to flush spills and to reduce or direct vapors in spill situations. Some of the materials covered by the guidebook can react violently or even explosively with water. In these cases, consider letting the fire burn or leaving the spill alone (except to prevent its spreading by diking) until additional technical advice can be obtained. The applicable guides clearly warn you of these potentially dangerous reactions. These materials require technical advice since

- (1) water getting inside a ruptured or leaking container may cause an explosion;
- (2) water may be needed to cool adjoining containers to prevent their rupturing (exploding) or further spread of the fires;
- (3) water may be effective in mitigating an incident involving a water-reactive material only if it can be applied at a sufficient flooding rate for an extended period; and

- (4) the products from the reaction with water may be more toxic, corrosive, or otherwise more undesirable than the product of the fire without water applied.

When responding to an incident involving water-reactive materials, take into account the existing conditions such as wind, precipitation, location and accessibility to the incident, as well as the availability of the agents to control the fire or spill. Because there are variables to consider, the decision to use water on fires or spills involving water-reactive materials should be based on information from an authoritative source; for example, a producer of the material, who can be contacted through the emergency response telephone number or the appropriate emergency response agency.

VAPOR CONTROL

Limiting the amount of vapor released from a pool of flammable or corrosive liquids is an operational concern. It requires the use of proper protective clothing, specialized equipment, appropriate chemical agents, and skilled personnel. Before engaging in vapor control, get advice from an authoritative source as to the proper tactics.

There are several ways to minimize the amount of vapors escaping from pools of spilled liquids, such as special foams, adsorbing agents, absorbing agents, and neutralizing agents. To be effective, these vapor control methods must be selected for the specific material involved and performed in a manner that will mitigate, not worsen, the incident.

Where specific materials are known, such as at manufacturing or storage facilities, it is desirable for the dangerous goods response team to prearrange with the facility operators to select and stockpile these control agents in advance of a spill. In the field, first responders may not have the most effective vapor control agent for the material available. They are likely to have only water and only one type of fire fighting foam on their vehicles. If the available foam is inappropriate for use, they are likely to use water spray. Because the water is being used to form a vapor seal, care must be taken not to churn or further spread the spill during application. Vapors that do not react with water may be directed away from the site using the air currents surrounding the water spray. Before using water spray or other methods to safely control vapor emission or to suppress ignition, obtain technical advice, based on specific chemical name identification.