

We all know that hazmat shipments need to show an emergency phone number, but what does it do?



Under many dangerous goods and hazardous materials regulations, shippers are required to display an emergency telephone number on the shipping document and, for tank truck and tank container consignments, on the outside of the tank. This phone number needs to give access to someone with technical knowledge of the product being shipped, 24 hours a day. This is primarily for the benefit of any emergency responders turning up at an incident.

In the US, this requirement is part of the Hazardous Materials Regulations at §172.604 in Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR). Shippers are allowed to have their own emergency response desks and some larger companies do, but many outsource this service to CHEMTREC, which was set up in 1971 by the US chemical industry specifically in order to operate a public service hotline for emergency response personnel. It allows firefighters, medical teams and law enforcement personnel to obtain information and assistance when dealing with emergencies involving hazardous materials.

In practice it works like this: CHEMTREC recently took a call from a fire brigade chief attending a crash involving two vehicles. One truck was hauling a tank trailer with UN 1075 propane, which was damaged in the collision. A 40 cm by 10 cm rip in the tank allowed gas to escape and ignite, leading to a boiling liquid expanding vapour explosion (BLEVE) that burned an area within 400 meters of the incident.

One driver was killed in the crash and the other was burned over 80 percent of his body. The problem for the fire brigade now was how to mitigate the risk posed by the remaining propane on the scene, which is why the call to CHEMTREC was placed. CHEMTREC arranged a conference call with the manufacturer of the material and the fire chief to agree on the best way to handle the remaining propane. CHEMTREC was also able to quickly dispatch company personnel to the scene of the accident.

THE GO-TO GUYS

That is a fairly simple task for CHEMTREC. Where the system comes into its own is when an incident involves toxic or corrosive

products whose properties may not be immediately obvious or where their chemical hazards may be camouflaged by a trade name. In such cases it will be necessary to refer to the material's safety data sheet (SDS) and interpret the information it contains. Those shippers that register with CHEMTREC have the right to show the CHEMTREC phone numbers on their SDSs and hazard communication labels and placards; this ensures that responders are directed as soon as feasible to the expertise of CHEMTREC's technical personnel to provide rapid information on the hazards being presented and the best ways to mitigate those hazards. In addition, it provides a seamless link to shippers' own response teams.

While it is based in the US and is operated by the American Chemistry Council (ACC), CHEMTREC has both domestic and international service levels. CHEMTREC is linked to the largest network of chemical and hazardous material experts in the world, including chemical and response specialists, public emergency services, and private contractors.