



U.S. Department of Human & Health Services/ Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry

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24-Hour: (215) 488-7100 (for agencies only)

GENERAL

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), as an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), serves the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information to prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances.

ATSDR is directed by congressional mandate to perform specific functions concerning the effect on public health of hazardous substances in the environment. These functions include public health assessments of waste sites, health consultations concerning specific hazardous substances, health surveillance and registries, response to emergency releases of hazardous substances, applied research in support of public health assessments, information development and dissemination, and education and training concerning hazardous substances.

The principal HHS response comes from the U.S. Public Health Service and is coordinated from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, and various Public Health Service regional offices. Within the Public Health Service, the primary response to a hazardous materials emergency comes from ATSDR and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Both ATSDR and CDC have a 24-hour emergency response capability wherein scientific and technical personnel are available to provide assistance to the lead federal agency and state and local response agencies on human health threat assessment and analysis, and exposure prevention and mitigation. Such assistance is used for situations requiring evacuation of affected areas, human exposure to hazardous materials, and technical advice on mitigation and prevention. CDC takes the lead during petroleum releases regulated under the Clean Water Act and Oil Pollution Act while ATSDR takes the lead during chemical releases under Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Both agencies are mutually supportive.

Mission and Goals

Formally organized in 1985, ATSDR was created by CERCLA. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) currently targets more than 1,200 National Priorities List (NPL) sites for cleanup. ATSDR is the lead federal public health agency responsible for determining human health effects associated with toxic exposures, preventing continued exposures, and mitigating associated human health risks at these NPL sites and others throughout the country.

The following goals have been established for ATSDR:

- Prevent ongoing and future exposures and resultant health effects from hazardous waste sites and releases.
- Determine human health effects associated with exposure to Superfund-related priority hazardous substances.

- Mitigate the risks of human health effects at toxic waste sites with documented exposures.
- Build and enhance effective partnerships.
- Promote effective and efficient agency management.

Role/Responsibility

During a response, under the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) for oil and hazardous materials, under the Stafford Act for presidentially declared disasters or emergency, or under the National Response Framework, ATSDR plays a significant role in the federal response. Their primary strategic roles include:

- Provide assistance on all matters related to the assessment of health hazards at a response and protection of response workers and the public health.
- Determine whether illnesses, diseases, or complaints may be attributable to exposure from a hazardous material.
- Establish disease/exposure registries and conduct appropriate clinical testing.
- Develop, maintain, and provide health information on the effects of toxic substances.

Laws/Authorities Governing their Response

- The National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) 40 CFR Part 300
- National Response Framework (NRF)
- Executive Order 12656 – Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities
- Executive Order 12148 – Federal Emergency Management
- The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as Amended
- The National Emergencies Act
- Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA)
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA)
- HSPD-5 Management of Domestic Incidents
- HSPD-7 Critical Infrastructure
- HSPD-8 National Preparedness

Response Requirements

During times of national threat or a Presidential Declaration, the Department of Homeland Security serves as the planning integrator for the President for a more robust federal incident management capability and in order to coordinate all federal incident management activities in support of our state and local partners. All federal departments and agencies may play significant roles in incident management and response activities, depending on the nature and size of an event. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordinates response support from across the Federal Government and certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by calling up, as needed, one or more of the 15 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs).

Each of these functions are coordinated by a single agency (Primary ESF Coordinating Agency) but may rely on other agencies (Support Agencies) to provide resources for each functional area. The mission of the ESFs is to provide the greatest possible access to capabilities of the Federal Government regardless of which agency has those capabilities. Under the National Response Framework, ATSDR plays a role (either as the Primary or as a Support agency) for the following ESFs:

ESF #	Primary Agency	Support Agency
1 Transportation		
2 Communications		
3 Public Works & Engineering		X
4 Firefighting		
5 Emergency Management		X
6 Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services		X
7 Logistics Management and Resource Support		X
8 Public Health and Medical Services	X	
9 Search and Rescue		X
10 Oil and Hazardous Materials Response		X
11 Agriculture and Natural Resources		X
12 Energy		
13 Public Safety and Security		
14 Long-Term Community Recovery		X
15 External Affairs		X