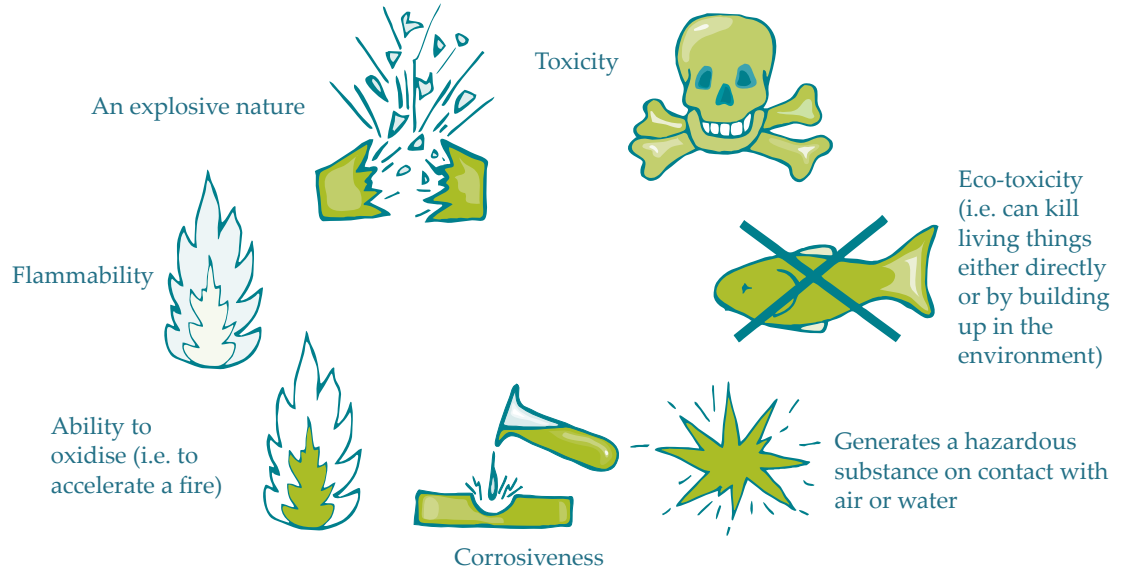


Hazardous Substances

This fact sheet describes risks associated with hazardous substances in the Wellington Region.

What are hazardous substances?

The Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 (HSNO) defines a hazardous substance as having one of the following properties:



Hazardous substances are often called dangerous goods or chemicals. Under HSNO, many substances that might not seem dangerous are termed 'hazardous'. For example, in large quantities milk may not hurt people, but a spill into a stream could harm wildlife.

What hazardous substances are in the Wellington Region?

Chemical storage sites are scattered around the Region, usually near areas of heavy industry. Explosives are used at quarries and are stored by the military. Chlorine is used in water treatment plants and swimming pools. Ammonia, solvents, caustic soda, corrosives and toxic substances such as lead are used in industry around the Region.

A natural hazard, like a storm, earthquake or tsunami, an accident or equipment failure could cause a chemical spill or fire. During an earthquake the ground close to the fault that has ruptured may suffer very strong shaking. A few hazardous substances storage facilities are located close to active faultlines in the Region. Earthquakes can cause warping of the ground in reclaimed or flat coastal areas, such as Seaview. Landslides caused by an earthquake or storm can damage storage tanks or drums that are near steep slopes. Seaview and some other storage sites are located near the coast; however, damage from tsunami or coastal flooding is not expected to cause a serious spill.

Storage sites or transportation routes are considered to be high risk if a spill or fire would harm large numbers of people or threaten a sensitive natural area. Most hazardous substances are kept or moved around in small amounts or are stored away from populated areas. However, Seaview and some storage sites in the Hutt Valley are considered high risk. There are also significant risks associated with transporting toxic gases like chlorine. How bad a spill or fire would be depends on the weather conditions at the time and the nature of the substance; for example, a liquid is usually more easily contained after a spill than a gas.

What can you do?

- Store all chemicals according to the instructions on their container. Make sure they are clearly labelled.
- If you do not know how to throw away a substance you think might be dangerous, contact your local council dangerous goods inspector for advice.
- Call 111 in a chemical spill or fire emergency.
- If there has been an accident involving a chemical spill or a fire, follow the instructions of the emergency services. Be prepared to evacuate up wind if necessary to get away from toxic gases or fumes.



Greater Wellington responds to pollution complaints and incidents around the clock. To report a pollution incident phone: 04 384 5708 or freephone 0800 496 734

How can spills and fires be prevented?

There are ways that the risks from hazardous substance spills or fires can be managed, for example:

- Trucks carrying chemicals can use alternative routes to avoid driving through areas where large numbers of people live or work.
- District and city councils can use planning and resource consents to locate storage sites away from large residential areas or sensitive natural areas.
- People can prepare for incidents and know what to do if a spill or fire occurs.
- Chemical companies can keep containment or fire fighting equipment at storage sites.

For more information, contact a dangerous goods inspector or civil defence emergency management advisor at your local council.



Further reading

Opus International Consultants, 2001. Risk Associated with Hazardous Substances in the Wellington Region: Scoping Study Report. Wellington: Opus International Consultants.

Copies are available from the Greater Wellington website (www.gw.govt.nz) or a printed version may be requested.

CONTACTS AND INFORMATION

Greater Wellington
Regional Council
Wellington Office
P O Box 11646
T 04 384 5708
F 04 385 6960
W www.gw.govt.nz