

December 16, 2005

# ENVIRO MATTERS

## The Emergency Response Division: A Critical Part of Our Agency

As the year winds down, it's time to reflect on the hardworking employees at the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and the multitude of tasks they perform, and risks they take - to serve the public. MDE's Emergency Response Division is a team of dedicated professionals who risk their health and safety daily to respond to environmental hazards or events. They stand ready to answer calls for oil and hazardous chemical spills, nuclear power plant incidents, and other environmental crises – including terrorist attacks.

### Hazardous Material Response

Our Emergency Response Division (ERD) consists of four hazardous material response officers, two HAZMAT supervisors, one division chief and one program manager to protect more than five million Maryland citizens. They are on call 24/7 to protect public safety and the environment. Through careful planning, training, and expert application of emergency response mechanisms, they minimize impacts on human health and the environment.

In 2005 alone, the ERD acted on 137 hazardous materials responses, 482 petroleum responses, three medical waste responses, and 46 other incidents, such as mercury releases, water pollution and debris removal. Our responders and supervisors take emergency vehicles home with them, so they can respond from home on evenings, weekends and holidays.

In keeping with MDE's work ethic of sharing and coordinating inter-agency information, our ERD team participates in the South Baltimore Industrial Mutual Aid Plan (SBIMAP). This innovative program facilitates the cooperation of other organizations, private companies and government agencies. It has 92 members in all, because one industry cannot handle an entire emergency on their own if its own spill occurs.

### On-site HAZMAT Specialists

ERD's program manager is the go to guy and on-scene coordinator for oil spills for the entire state. A prime example of their work is the Howard Street Tunnel Fire on July 21. A derailed train caught fire, causing the evacuation of 44,000 people in Camden yards in the middle of a baseball double-header. The tunnel closed for over a week, and acid rail cars were subject to flames. Because of MDE's relationship with CSX Railroad, a SBIMAP member – the company was familiar with our expectations for the cleanup. Training together ensures standardized operations and effective response. The team goes by an old adage – The last place you want to introduce yourself, is in an emergency.

MDE continues to provide training to state and local responders to properly address potential chemical, biological and radiological threats. We are also working to ensure the security of the state's drinking water and responding to emergency calls about unidentified substances across the state, including anthrax alerts. Geographically, we're in a critical area due to the proximity of our nation's capital, a tempting target. Our critical infrastructures, such as the two tunnels and Bay Bridge, as well as Fort McHenry, are historic treasures. Marylanders should feel assured that we are working hard so these resources, including the ever-treasured Chesapeake Bay, are protected. We salute the ERD and wish all Maryland citizens happy holidays and a safe new year.



**Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor**  
**Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor**



**Kendl P. Philbrick, Secretary**  
**Jonas A. Jacobson, Deputy Secretary**

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