

AMMONIA FACT SHEET

What is ammonia?

Ammonia is a colorless gas with a very sharp odor. It can be man-made or can occur naturally. The odor is common to most people because ammonia is used in smelling salts, household cleaners and window cleaning products. Certain ammonium salts have long been used in veterinary and human medicine.

How can you be exposed to ammonia?

You can be exposed to high levels of ammonia by breathing in contaminated air from leaks and spills at various production plants, tank trucks, pipelines, rail cars and storage facilities. You can also be exposed if you use cleaning products at home, apply ammonia fertilizers or live near farms where these fertilizers have been applied.

What are the immediate symptoms of exposure to ammonia?

Ammonia is a corrosive substance and the main toxic effects are restricted to the sites of direct contact with ammonia (i.e., skin, eyes, respiratory tract, mouth, and digestive tract). For example, if you spilled a bottle of concentrated ammonia on the floor, you would smell a strong ammonia odor; you might cough, and your eyes might water because of irritation. If you were exposed to very high levels of ammonia, you would experience more harmful effects. For example, if you walked into a dense cloud of ammonia or if your skin comes in contact with concentrated ammonia, your skin, eyes, throat, or lungs may be severely burned. These burns might be serious enough to cause permanent blindness, lung disease, or death. Likewise, if you accidentally ate or drank concentrated ammonia, you might experience burns in your mouth, throat, and stomach.

What are the long-term health effects of exposure to ammonia?

There is no evidence that ammonia causes cancer. Ammonia has not been classified for carcinogenic effects by EPA, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

How can I reduce the risk of exposure to ammonia?

You can reduce your risk of contact to ammonia by carefully using household products. Avoid areas where ammonia is used or produced. You should wear proper clothing and eye protection, because ammonia can cause skin burns and damage eyes if it is splashed on them. If you have children, tell them to stay out of the room when you are using ammonia.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to ammonia?

If you think you have been exposed to ammonia, there are tests that can detect ammonia in your blood and urine. However, these tests cannot definitely determine if you have been exposed because ammonia is normally found in the body. If you are exposed to large amounts of ammonia, **call 911 for medical attention right away. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

Where can I get more information on ammonia?

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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