

LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE



WHAT IS A LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE (LEPC)?

A Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is a voluntary organization which is established in an Emergency Planning District designated by the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC).

Both the SERC and the LEPCs were established to meet the requirements of the Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), also known as the Superfund Amendments and Re-authorization Act (SARA, Title III), for emergency response planning.

What does a LEPC do?

Under EPCRA, the LEPC is the focal point for chemical emergency response planning and implementation in a community. The LEPC's key responsibilities are:

- assisting local governments in developing hazardous materials emergency response plans
- evaluating the community's need for resources to respond to hazardous materials emergencies
- processing requests from the public for information on hazardous chemicals in their communities

Who Participates in an LEPC?

Each LEPC must include, at a minimum, representatives from the following groups or organizations:

- elected state and local officials
- law enforcement, civil defense, firefighting, first aid, health, emergency medical services, local environmental, hospital, and transportation personnel
- broadcast and print media
- community groups
- industry - owners and operators of facilities subject to the reporting requirements of EPCRA

Because the LEPC's members represent the community, they should be familiar with factors that affect public safety, the environment, and the economy of the community. That expertise is essential as the LEPC develops a plan tailored to the needs of its planning district (Cherokee County).

An emergency plan must include the identity and location of hazardous materials, procedures for immediate response to a chemical accident, ways to notify the public about actions they must take, names of coordinators at plants, and schedules and plans for testing the plan. Once the plan is written, the SERC must review it. The LEPC must publicize the plan through the public meetings or newspaper announcements, get public comments, and periodically test the plan by conducting emergency drills. The LEPC must also update the plan at least annually and let the public know of its activities.

The LEPC has other responsibilities besides developing an emergency response plan. It receives emergency releases and hazardous chemical inventory information submitted by local facilities and must make this information available to the public upon request. It must establish and publicize procedures for handling these requests.

LEPCs have the authority to request additional information from facilities for their own planning purposes or on behalf of others. LEPCs may want to visit facilities in their communities to find out what they are doing to reduce hazards, prepare for accidents, and reduce hazardous inventories and releases. LEPCs can take civil actions against facilities if they fail to provide the information required under the Act.

In addition to its formal responsibilities, the LEPC serves as a focal point in the community for information and discussions about hazardous substances, emergency planning, and health and environmental risks. Citizens will expect the LEPC to reply to questions about chemical hazards and risk management actions. It can also anticipate questions about the health and environmental effects of routine toxic chemical releases. Even though this information is not required by the law to be sent to LEPCs, EPA and the states are working together to ensure this information is available at the local level. Many companies are voluntarily providing local committees and other citizens with this information.

An LEPC can most effectively carry out its responsibilities as a community forum by taking steps to educate the public about chemical risks and working with facilities to minimize those risks. The value of the information provided by the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act will be limited unless citizens are given the means to understand the information and its implications. The LEPC's ability to improve the safety and health of its community will be greatly enhanced by the support of an informed and active citizenry.

