

Community FAQs for Teutopolis Anhydrous Ammonia Release

What is anhydrous ammonia?

Anhydrous ammonia (NH₃) is a colorless gas with a very sharp odor at low concentrations. A majority (80%) of all manufactured ammonia is used as agricultural fertilizer, a third of which is directly applied to soil as anhydrous ammonia.

What symptoms can ammonia exposure cause?

Exposure to ammonia may cause eye, nose, and throat irritation, breathing difficulty, wheezing, or chest pain. Breathing very high concentrations may cause more severe health problems. Swallowing concentrated solutions of ammonia can cause burns in your mouth, throat, and stomach. People who do not currently have symptoms are not likely to develop complications. If you were exposed to harmful amounts of ammonia, you would notice it immediately because of the strong, unpleasant, and irritating smell, the strong taste, and because of skin, eye, nose, or throat irritation.

What should I do if I experience symptoms or have concerns about my health?

If you are experiencing symptoms or have health concerns, please contact your healthcare provider. You can also call the Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222.

Did responders conduct air monitoring for ammonia in the community? What were the results?

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) conducted air monitoring in the community and evacuation zone before residents were allowed to return home on the evening of Saturday, September 30th, 2023. All readings were at or below 0.2 parts per million (ppm) except for a brief and un-sustained reading of 0.5 ppm. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) advised that it would be okay for residents to return home if the readings were below 1.7 ppm, a minimum risk level for ammonia.

Should I consider having my private water well tested?

We are coordinating with state partners to organize the testing of private water wells in the vicinity of the incident and will expand the scope if necessary.

Are garden vegetables safe to eat?

Homegrown fruits and vegetables can be safely consumed after thoroughly washing and rinsing. Discard the outer leaves of greens before washing. Rinse and peel all root vegetables which were in direct contact with soil.

Could items in my kitchen be contaminated?

It is very unlikely that canned goods, sealed containers, or packaged items have been affected. Produce on your kitchen table or counter can be rinsed off like garden vegetables.

Is there anything else I can do?

Grills, patio furniture, and other outdoor items can be washed with soap and water.

Who can I contact if my pets or livestock appear to have symptoms?

If you think your pet or livestock may have been exposed, call your veterinarian or the Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435. A consultation fee may apply.

What options does an owner/producer have for the disposal of animal mortalities?

The Illinois Animal Mortality Act and Rules should be followed in all instances of livestock or other animal mortalities (see below for link). Questions about the Act can be directed to 217-782-4944 at the Bureau of Animal Welfare in the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Who can I contact if I have additional questions?

Effingham County Health Department continues to collaborate with multiple local, state, and federal agencies and subject matter experts to respond to community concerns. Please contact the Health Department if you have any health-related questions. We will do our best to answer your questions and provide informational resources.

Additional Resources

<https://agr.illinois.gov/animals/animalhealth/animal-health-welfare-laws.html>

<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp126-c1-b.pdf>