



## FACT SHEET

### Exposure of Pets to South Carolina Chlorine Release

#### What is chlorine?

At room temperature, chlorine is a yellow-green gas that is heavier than air and has a strong irritating odor. It can be converted to a liquid under pressure or cold temperatures. Chlorine is mainly used as a bleach in making paper, cloth, and a wide variety of other products.

#### How can exposure to chlorine affect my pet's health?

Chlorine gas is irritating and corrosive to the throat and lungs, eyes, and skin. The severity of health problems depends on how much chlorine your pet is exposed to and for how long. Exposure to low levels of chlorine gas can cause coughing and eye and skin irritation. Exposure to higher levels can cause a burning feeling of the eyes and skin, rapid breathing, wheezing, blue coloring of the skin, fluid in the lungs, and pain in the chest. Exposure to much higher levels can produce severe eye and skin burns, respiratory failure, and death.

#### How many animals were killed in the Graniteville, South Carolina, chlorine release? What did they die from?

Out of about 300 pets (mostly dogs, cats, and birds) in the controlled zone, emergency responders have found only four dead animals. Two cats and two dogs (outside homes in the direct path of the chlorine plume) died from breathing concentrated chlorine vapor. One other dog found dead in the road appeared to be a stray struck by a car. Hydrochloric acid (formed when chlorine gas contacts water vapor) appears to have killed fish in a local stream that receives drainage from the affected area.

#### Could my pet still get sick or die from the chlorine vapors?

No. Health problems from chlorine occur quickly. If your pet breathed in vapors from the initial release or if his skin was exposed, he would have gotten sick right away. Long-term health problems are not anticipated.

#### Why are some of the evacuated pets having diarrhea and vomiting?

Exposure to chlorine is not known to cause diarrhea or vomiting. Pets who develop these symptoms after returning to their owners probably were affected by the stressful situation caused by the forced evacuation and confinement or were exposed to an infectious agent separate from the chlorine release. If your pet develops vomiting, diarrhea, or other symptoms, consult your veterinarian.

#### Do I need to decontaminate my pet?

Pets recovered from the controlled zone did not require decontamination. Chlorine vapor does not persist in the environment.

#### Can I be exposed to chlorine from my pet?

No. Pets that were in the controlled zone cannot contaminate people or other animals. Any chlorine vapor they were exposed to would have evaporated and dispersed rapidly, long before the emergency response teams reached them.

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### How should I protect my pet after we return home?

Protect your pet in the same way you would protect yourself. You might want to consider taking the following steps:

- Open doors and windows, and run the heating and air conditioning systems for 30 minutes to circulate the air.
- Change intake filters on the heating and air conditioning systems.
- Run water from the taps for 2 minutes before filling your pet's water bowl.
- Wash or dispose of your pet's bedding.
- Wash or dispose of your pet's toys or other objects he is likely to chew.
- Wipe down or hose off any surfaces your pet might contact.
- Throw out any food that was left open and unprotected or that spoiled in the refrigerator. If you wouldn't eat it yourself, to be safe, you shouldn't feed it to your pet. Remember: ***When in doubt, throw it out!***

### Where can I get more information?

- Call your veterinarian ***first*** if you have questions about your own animal.
- Call the National Animal Poison Control Center if you would like to speak with a veterinary toxicology specialist about additional specific concerns. (There is a charge for this service).

For more information, visit [www.bt.cdc.gov/chemical](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/chemical), or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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