Precautions for emergency responders at the scene of suspected chemical suicide incidents

Survey surroundings of scene and vehicle
• Search the area or the vehicle’s exterior for posted or visible warning signs.
• Look for open containers or a mixing container.
• Look for attempts to seal the vehicle, such as taping of doors, windows, and air vents.
• Do NOT rely on the presence of a chemical or unusual odor as a warning signal.

Secure the area
• If gas is emitting from the vehicle, first responders should stay upwind.
• Keep bystanders away from the scene.
• Hazardous materials (HAZMAT) team or other responders trained to handle hazardous chemicals can help prevent the spreading of the gas while wearing appropriate protective gear.

Communication
• Call the local HAZMAT team or other responders trained to handle hazardous materials.
• Ensure dispatch information is shared among all responders to enhance safety.

Decontamination
• Decontaminate the victim at the scene.
• Decontaminate all responders and victims involved in the incident.
• Evaporated gas from the wet clothes of patients can cause secondary poisoning or contamination.
• Warn hospital personnel to take appropriate measures to avoid contamination of incoming patients.

Transportation and treatment of victim
• Because hydrogen sulfide and cyanide gases are in patient’s exhalations, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation is unsafe.
• No antidote exists for hydrogen sulfide poisoning; treatment is supportive.
• Exposure to hydrogen cyanide requires supportive care and rapid administration of specific antidotes.
• Chemicals off-gassing from the victim might poison emergency medical services, morgue, or other response personnel; therefore, the transport vehicle should be well ventilated.

Sources: