

Suicide Method Poses An Officer Safety Hazard

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There is a method of suicide being publicized around the Internet that can offer a deadly hazard to law enforcement officers and others who may come upon the scene of such an incident.

The information was received through our EMS information channels. Elsevier Public Safety publishes *Law Officer* magazine, but also [JEMS](#) and [Fire-Rescue](#) magazines, with corresponding web sites.

The notice came from Dr. Paul Pepe, a professor and chair of emergency medicine at the University of Texas Medical Center at Dallas. It reads as follows:

Recently a new way to commit suicide has been discovered by mixing two chemicals that can be bought over the counter at local stores. They are Bonide - a sulfur spray used as an insecticide for fruit trees and hydrochloric (muriatic) acid. Once mixed, the chemicals produce heat and a flammable, noxious gas that causes the subject to pass out and the heart stop within minutes. The process appears to be quick and painless. Two recent cases, one in Pasadena, California and the other at Lake Allatoona in Bartow County, Georgia, involved young men in their early 20's. Both were found locked inside their cars with the chemicals. Each left a note on the car warning anyone around of danger. The car at Lake Allatoona had been taped to prevent gas from escaping.

Does this sound like a routine call that most of us would respond to and take similar action?

It's Sunday morning 0730 hours, you respond to a person down in auto.

You locate a car in the empty parking lot of a business. The engine and med unit pull up near the vehicle and personnel see a person inside that appears to be asleep or unconscious. Wearing safety glasses and medical gloves, you walk up to the car and knock on the window.

The patient does not respond to your knock on the window, and the doors are locked.

What action will you take? Will you hurry to make patient access? Will you use a lockout tool, center punch, or halligan to make entry?

You make access, a rush of warm air comes out of the vehicle and you smell a sharp odor. You have just become a victim and have been exposed to a noxious possibly fatal gas.

What could you have done differently? You are the first-in unit. How should you respond to this type of incident?

1. *Do not become complacent! Your response should be similar on every call.*
2. *Be well trained, know your job, do your job.*
3. *Start your size-up from the time a call is dispatched.*
4. *Establish a strong command and control the scene.*
5. *Don't go rushing in.*

6. *Survey the scene.*
7. *Does the scene look routine?*
8. *Do you see anything unusual? (Example: A note on the window, containers inside the vehicle and taped windows or vents).*
9. *Is the scene safe?*
10. *Wear the appropriate PPE.*
11. *Establish a Hot Zone.*
12. *Develop a plan of action and coordinate activities.*
13. *Call for additional resources. (Hazmat Team, PD, etc.)*
14. *Did PD arrive prior to FD and become contaminated requiring emergency decon and first aid?*

The call listed in the first paragraph of this document started as a routine person down call. This type of incident can easily expand into a full blown Hazardous Materials Incident with a multijurisdictional response. Be aware of this new way to commit suicide and don't become a victim. Use common sense and stay safe.

I'll re-emphasize that last sentence. Instinct may try and compel you to smash the window and rescue the person(s) inside, but you may do nothing more than to create another victim that has to be rescued--you. Count to ten and review your training before you succumb to "thundering herd" syndrome.

You can see the Bonide logo [here](#). I'm not going to include it in this blog entry directly because of copyright and trademark issues. I will also mention that I'm sure Bonide is a perfectly safe product when it is used as intended and according to the manufacturer's instructions. Like so many other things, it can be put to ends the maker never intended, and then it can be hazardous.

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