

Health & Safety, Chemical Deaths

Chemical suicides, also called detergent suicides, involve self-inflicted exposure to toxic gases in a confined space (for example, cars, bathrooms, or closets), gases created by mixing consumer products or common household chemicals. This technique appears to have originated in Japan and has since become an increasingly popular method for suicide after instructions became available online. The two most common toxic gases produced are hydrogen sulphide and hydrogen cyanide.

Hydrogen Sulphide

Cleaning products that contain acids (such as muriatic or hydrochloric acid) can be mixed with compounds that contain sulphur (such as pesticides and insecticides) to generate hydrogen sulphide. Hydrogen sulphide gas is an asphyxiant that suffocates victims at the cellular level, rendering cells in the body unable to use oxygen.

The effects and symptoms begin to show almost immediately after exposure begins. At low concentrations, hydrogen sulphide can be easily detected because of its unusual, rotten egg odour. At higher concentrations, the odour might not be detected at all, because hydrogen sulphide paralyzes the olfactory nerve and deadens the sense of smell.

Symptoms can include:

- Respiratory irritation
- Coughing
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headaches
- Disorientation
- Tremors
- Suffocation
- Coma
- Death

Once the toxicant reaches the brain, successful rescue is unlikely because breathing is rapidly and severely affected.

Hydrogen Cyanide

Hydrogen cyanide is less common and is created using an acid source and cyanide salts such as sodium cyanide or potassium cyanide.

Hydrogen cyanide is more easily absorbed through contact with mucous membranes, eyes, and skin. The effects and symptoms of hydrogen cyanide poisoning are similar to those caused by hydrogen sulphide:

Hydrogen cyanide has a distinctive bitter almond odour. Like hydrogen sulphide, stronger concentrations of hydrogen cyanide deaden the sense of smell.

Early symptoms of exposure associated with lower doses include:

- Restlessness
- Increased respiratory rate
- Giddiness
- Headache
- Palpitation
- Difficulty breathing
- Symptoms that may develop later with lower doses or acutely with higher doses include:
- Vomiting
- Convulsions
- Respiratory failure
- Arrhythmias
- Unconsciousness
- Death