

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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## “Hazardous Materials Training”



Twenty-four firemen from across the state have been in Norfolk the last two weeks for intensive training in dealing with hazardous materials. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the US Department of Homeland Security funded the classroom space and four trainers to come to Norfolk for the last two weeks for the Hazardous Materials Technician Course. During that time, the firemen have been listening to lectures and practicing techniques that would be used in a hazardous materials emergency.

There are ten hazardous materials response teams in Nebraska. According to City of Norfolk Fire Chief Shane

Weidner, the Norfolk Fire Department is the response team for the Northeast and North Central Nebraska area that spreads east to the Missouri River, north to Sioux City, south to Columbus and west to Valentine. The majority of the members of the Norfolk Fire Department have received the hazardous materials response training. Six members of the Norfolk Department are in the current Norfolk training class.

“In the training you learn offensive actions that might need to be taken at a hazardous materials scene including plugging, patching, diverting, diking, and product recovery. Our team is ready to respond to anything from a propane leak to an industrial based accident that would result in the release of hazardous chemicals,” Weidner said.

The three hazardous chemicals that the firemen are most concerned with in Northeast and North Central Nebraska are anhydrous ammonia, sulfuric acid and propane.

“We take care of chemical discharges after traffic accidents, farm chemical spills or valve releases. We patch it if we can. We secure the area. If a meth lab is discovered, the hazmat team is responsible for tearing it down safely,” Weidner said.

Don Angell is an instructor with the Fairmount Fire Protection District in Golden, Colorado. He and three others have provided the eighty hours of training the past two weeks for the hazardous materials class. He said the students get classroom instruction and hands on experience working with rail cars, chlorine gas leaks, reading instruments that monitor for carbon dioxide, and grounding areas that may be prone to static electricity ignites.

“The students rotate through four different scenarios in two shifts. They get plenty of (hazardous waste protection) suit time. When the real event occurs, it’s much easier for them,” Angell said.

The students spent a portion of the training in a classroom in the Lifelong Learning Center on the Northeast Community College campus. They then practiced techniques at the Northeast Nebraska Fire Training Center on Benjamin Avenue.

“Norfolk has a very nice set of facilities for us to work in. It’s a great opportunity for people to become trained for dangerous hazardous waste emergencies,” Angell said.

Weidner emphasized the importance of not storing hazardous chemicals especially muriatic acid used often for cleaning purposes.

“These chemicals are tools and once you’re done with them you need to dispose of them properly. There’s been many times where we’ve responded to a fire and found it to be an especially dangerous situation because of the chemicals stored near the fire,” Weidner said.

He reminds residents not to try to clean up chemical spills or repair leaks of containers holding dangerous chemicals but to contact local authorities who will dispatch those who are trained to safely respond to these situations.