

Public Safety Fact Sheet

A publication of the Washington County Anti-Terrorism Advisory Committee

In response to recent world and national events, representatives from police and fire agencies, local governments, health officials and emergency managers within Washington County have increased coordination and communication. The goal of this effort, known as the Anti-Terrorism Advisory Committee (ATAC), is to help ensure an effective countywide response to a major public safety incident. Additionally, ATAC is committed to enhancing public safety by educating the community on topics of public interest and concern through an on-going series of informational fact sheets.

Recent news accounts have featured two incidents involving the discovery of a poison called “ricin.” Although no one was injured, these incidents are currently being investigated by law enforcement officials. **It is important to remember that ricin is difficult to disseminate in large quantities. The likelihood of an individual being intentionally or accidentally poisoned is extremely small.**

What is Ricin?

Ricin is a poison made from the ‘mash’ that remains after processing castor beans for oil. Castor beans are grown worldwide, and oil from the castor bean is now used mainly as an industrial lubricant and a leather processing agent.

Ricin Poisoning

Ricin is a poison, not a disease; therefore, it is not contagious. It prevents the cells of a person’s body from making critical proteins. Without these proteins, the cells are damaged and the person may become ill or die. Ricin can be produced in many forms – powder, mist, or pellet. The effects of ricin poisoning depend on whether it is inhaled, swallowed, or injected. If you are exposed to ricin, the goal is to remove the toxin from the body as quickly as possible. There is no antidote for ricin.

Do I Need to be Concerned about Ricin?

If you are concerned about a suspicious substance, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the substance out of context with the surroundings?
- Is the substance in a location where it could possibly cause harm?
- Is the substance accompanied by an obvious threat?
- Are there other suspicious circumstances surrounding the incident?
- Are you or others experiencing the same adverse physical signs / symptoms?

If you still believe the substance to be suspicious, contact Washington County’s 9-1-1Center at (503) 629-0111 (non-emergency).

For More Information

- Washington County Public Health: (503) 846-3594
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- CDC Public Response Hotline (Mon-Fri: 8 am – 11 pm / Sat and Sun: 10 am – 8 pm):
English: (888) 246-2675 Spanish: (888) 246-2857 TTY: (866) 874-2646



What is Ricin? (Topic #11)