



Circular number	17-2005	Date issued	29 April 2005
This circular is	For guidance	No response required	
This circular is	Not relevant to the National Framework		
Status	Guidance relating to CYMAG pesticides further to their ban on 31st December 2004.		

Guidance Relating to the Prohibition of CYMAG Pesticides

Issued by:

Dennis Ricketts
Assistant Inspector of Fire Services
Operational Risk Management Group
HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Addressed to:

The Chief Fire Officer
The Commissioner of the London Fire and
Emergency Planning Authority

Please forward to:

Hazmats Officers and Operational Personnel
Health & Safety Officers

Summary

CYMAG pesticides were banned for use, storage or supply as from 31st December 2004 and may now only be disposed of by a waste contractor licensed by the Environment Agency. It has been suggested that there could be an increase in illegal dumping of these pesticides and individuals may try to dispose of or leave them at police and fire stations.

This circular sets out a protocol for Fire & Rescue Services to follow when encountering CYMAG pesticides, both operationally and when requested to dispose of them. It updates paragraph 22 of Dear Chief Officer Letter 5/1987 Part C.

For further information, contact:

Dennis Ricketts
Zone 18D
Portland House
Stag Place
London
SW1E 5LP

Direct line	020 7944 5693
Fax	020 7944 5558
E-mail	Dennis.Ricketts@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

General helpline **020 7944 8194**

Website www.odpm.gov.uk

1.0 Background

- 1.1 CYMAG pesticides have been widely used for many years by farmers, gamekeepers and mole-catchers for the control of rabbits and vermin. The main ingredient of CYMAG pesticides is sodium cyanide which is very toxic and releases highly toxic hydrogen cyanide gas on contact with water and acids. Because the product is so highly dangerous it became illegal to use or store from 31st December 2004.
- 1.2 CYMAG may now be disposed of only by a waste contractor licensed by the Environment Agency. However, there is a significant cost involved when using a licensed waste contractor and in order to avoid these costs, individuals have been trying to hand their stocks in at police stations. Police officers and counter staff have been advised not to take possession of CYMAG products and it is predicted that illegal dumping of the product may increase.
- 1.3 It is therefore possible that individuals may attempt to hand in their stocks at fire stations and fire and rescue services may also be called to incidents involving dumped CYMAG. The protocols at paragraphs 3 and 4 below set out the actions fire and rescue service personnel should take when encountering CYMAG.

2.0 Identification and characteristics of CYMAG

- 2.1 CYMAG may also be known as sodium cyanide, cianuro di sodio (Italian), cyanure de sodium (French), cyanide of sodium, cyanobrik, cyanogran, hydrogen cyanide sodium salt, kyanid sodny (Czech).
- 2.2 It will usually be in the form of white granules or powder and will have a slightly bitter-almond odour when moist.



Typical Cymag container

2.3 CYMAG is very toxic by ingestion, inhalation and on contact with the skin. In contact with water or moisture it will release small amounts of highly toxic hydrogen cyanide gas. It is this release of hydrogen cyanide in contact with moisture that has enabled CYMAG to be used as an effective pesticide. In contact with acids it will produce large quantities of hydrogen cyanide gas and is likely to be lethal to anyone near to the release not wearing appropriate PPE and RPE (chemical protective clothing with positive pressure breathing apparatus). It should also be noted that, although CYMAG is non-flammable, any hydrogen cyanide gas liberated as a result of its reaction with water or acids is highly flammable.

3.0 If CYMAG is brought to Fire Stations

- 3.1 It is possible that individuals may attempt to leave CYMAG products with fire and rescue service personnel at fire stations. These individuals should be advised to contact their local Environment Agency Office who can advise on safe disposal options.
- 3.2 Acceptance of these products is likely to involve significant costs to the fire and rescue service and may put personnel at risk.

4.0 Dealing with illegally dumped CYMAG

- 4.1 If fire and rescue service personnel are called to incidents involving containers of CYMAG, they should take the following actions.
- 4.2 If it can be observed from a safe distance that the containers do not appear to be reacting or are not involved in a fire situation, they should not be approached and the area cordoned off. The Environment Agency should be called to arrange for legal disposal. Personal contact with the containers must be avoided. If no lives are at risk and there is no immediate danger to the environment, personnel should stay upwind of the containers and adopt a non-intervention policy.
- 4.3 If the containers are reacting or are involved in a fire, intervention personnel should don, as a minimum, liquid-tight chemical protective clothing with breathing apparatus. The use of aqueous firefighting media is likely to produce small amounts of highly toxic hydrogen cyanide gas and therefore a dry agent such as sand is preferable. A water spray should only be used by personnel wearing chemical protective clothing with positive pressure breathing apparatus and where there is also a danger to life. Water must not be sprayed directly into the containers. **Carbon Dioxide extinguishers must not be used.**
- 4.4 CYMAG has a high potential to affect aquatic organisms and terrestrial plants and should therefore be contained if at all possible. If the substance has been released into the environment in the form of a solution, it should be washed away with copious amounts of water as it will biodegrade if sufficiently diluted.

5.0 First Aid measures

- 5.1 If eyes or skin have been in contact with CYMAG they should be flushed with water for at least 15 minutes. Contaminated clothing should be removed and bagged for disposal.
- 5.2 In the event of ingestion, seek immediate medical aid and do not induce vomiting unless directed by medical personnel.
- 5.3 If inhaled, seek immediate medical aid and remove from exposure into fresh air. If breathing is difficult give oxygen or air from breathing apparatus. Artificial respiration must only be carried out using a mask with a one-way valve.

6.0 Other background documents

- 6.1 This Circular updates information contained in Dear Chief Officer Letter 5/1987 Part C, paragraph 22 and page 324 of the Manual of Firemanship, Practical Firemanship III, part 6c.

Dennis Ricketts