**INTRODUCTION**

Decontamination is the process of removing or neutralizing contaminants that have accumulated on personnel and equipment. Decontamination protects workers from hazardous substances that may contaminate and eventually permeate the protective clothing, respiratory equipment, tools, vehicles, and other equipment used.

**PREVENTION OF CONTAMINATION**

The first step in decontamination is to establish procedures that minimize contact with waste and thus the potential for contamination. For example:

* + - * Work practices mandate that there be no direct contact with hazardous substances (e.g., do not walk through areas of obvious contamination, do not directly touch potentially hazardous substances).
      * Wear disposable outer garments and use disposable equipment where appropriate.

In addition, procedures should be established that maximize worker protection. Personal protective equipment is for accidental splash protection and for respiratory protection. This requires procedures for dressing prior to entering the clean-up area that will minimize the potential for contaminants to bypass the protective clothing and escape decontamination. In general, all fasteners should be used (i.e., zippers fully closed, all buttons used, all snaps closed, etc.). Boots should be tucked under legs of outer clothing, and hoods (if not attached) should be worn outside the collar. If the task involves raising one’s hands above the head, outer gloves should be placed over the outer clothing. If the task involves reaching down, however, tuck the gloves under the outer clothing.

