Think Before You Act - Safety Talk Handout

Act quickly, but think first. That is good advice for first aid and emergency response personnel. It's also good advice for anyone facing an accident scene or attempting a rescue.

Helping others in trouble can put you in the same danger. Protect yourself first so you will be able to help and walk away unhurt.

It's natural to want to jump in and save someone. Unfortunately, rescuers often become victims themselves by climbing into confined spaces, diving into water, stepping into traffic or crossing downed power lines. Unprepared rescuers also expose themselves to deadly bloodborne illness and violence from criminals and distraught victims.

Whether you are a trained rescuer or just someone who wants to help, know how to protect yourself first. Stop and assess the scene before you enter it. These are some dangers to look for:

- In a plant yard or on a public roadway, watch for moving vehicles. Assign a responsible person immediately to stop or redirect traffic.
- Stay away from energized electrical equipment. When someone is injured by electrical shock, rescuers must be sure to keep clear of the same hazard. Fallen power lines are a common result of traffic crashes and must be avoided.
- Do not enter a confined space unless you are trained, authorized and properly equipped to do so. More than half the victims of confined space fatalities are would-be rescuers who rush in without the necessary respiratory protection. They do not realize they can be suffocated by lack of oxygen or poisoned by toxic gas within seconds.
- A chemical spill might be more dangerous than it appears. Don't go near it or attempt to clean it up unless you are trained and authorized to do so. Use the right protective gear and clean-up materials.
- Drowning victims sometimes take their rescuers down with them. Many people have died trying to find or reach others who have fallen into water. A drowning victim may also panic and try to hit or climb onto a rescuer. Trained lifesavers have techniques for winning these wrestling contests in the water so they can tow a victim safely to shore.
- Violence is a hazard for someone entering a possible crime scene. Before you rush in to help the victim of an assault or robbery, make sure you won't be attacked. A shooting or stabbing victim might also be armed.
- Broken glass, jagged metal, hot surfaces and spilled fuel can be dangers at the scene of a motor vehicle accident or workplace incident.
- Excavations are also hazard zones for rescuers. A trench wall that has caved in on someone can continue to collapse on rescuers.
Protect yourself from bloodborne diseases such as HIV (which causes AIDS) and Hepatitis C when you care for an injured person. Carry latex or similarly effective gloves in your vehicle, and double-glove to increase protection.

Before you enter an emergency scene, look it over. Try to understand the sequence of events that occurred, and be wary of any dangers. While you are saving others, look out for yourself.