

# Quick decisions vital in hazardous cleanup

■ A hazardous materials worker must sum up the problem quickly and figure out how to safely resolve it.

By **JULIE DICKERSON**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

HALTOM CITY — Sometimes, a busy day on the job for Richard Cameron resembles a big-budget Hollywood action thriller — minus the stuntmen who step in when things get dangerous.

As an expert in hazardous materials cleanup and removal, Cameron and his crews have been called to deal with leaking cyanide tanks; fiery, overturned trucks carrying oxygen and acetylene bottles that could become missiles; potentially explosive drums filled with mysterious chemicals; and highway fuel spills that have left traffic at a standstill.

"You have to undergo a lot of training to be in this business," said Cameron, chief executive and president of Protect Environmental. "This line of work is hard, dangerous and extremely exciting."

To comply with requirements set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Cameron, 50, esti-

mates that he has more than 1,000 combined hours of training on topics such as blood-borne pathogens, respiratory protection, hazard assessment, decontamination procedures, fire awareness and trench safety.

In just moments, he must determine which chemicals will neutralize others, what type of protective gear is needed for a particular spill and how to communicate effectively with emergency officials to ensure the safety of his workers and the surrounding community.

"Time is of the essence in a lot of these emergency spills," said Ed Grant, a company spokesman. "When you're suited up and carrying an air tank on your back, it's not easy to move quickly. There's quite a lot of adrenaline."

After more than nine years in business, the company has never had an injury serious enough that an employee lost any time from work, Cameron said.

## IN THE KNOW

### Hazardous cleanup

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has established regulations for the hazardous materials industry. Although it does not provide training or certifications, it is responsible for making sure the standards are being followed.

■ OSHA can make inspections at any time.

■ If workers are not properly trained, OSHA could impose fines and penalties against the company.

SOURCE: Richard Ranck, OSHA assistant area director for Fort Worth

Many of the 35 employees at the Haltom City headquarters are off-duty firefighters who work part time as needed. In addition to their firefighter training, the company requires another 80 hours of training in hazardous waste procedures. All employees must be certified according to the Code of Federal Regulations.

The crews can handle about five major spills simultaneously, he said. Emer-

gency calls can come in any time, day or night, from chemical refineries to department stores. Accidents happen frequently, he said.

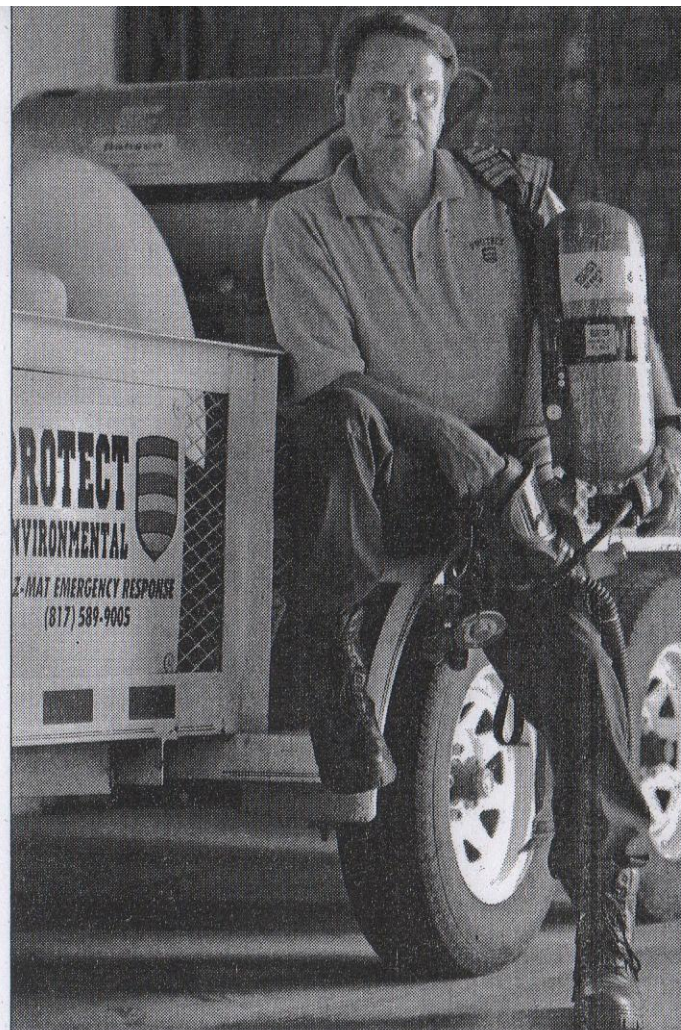
"By and large, there's still a tremendous amount of sloppy practices and illegal dumping," Cameron said.

Job opportunities are abundant in the hazardous materials industry, he said. Cameron advises that anyone considering it as a career should first get a degree in biology, chemistry or geology as a basic foundation. Cameron holds a bachelor's degree in geology from the University of Texas at Arlington.

"This is a science," he stressed.

In spite of the pressures of making split-second, often life-threatening decisions, Cameron said he couldn't imagine a more rewarding career.

"When somebody needs your help and you are able to respond in this respect, it gives you a great sense of satisfaction," he said. "You're helping the whole community."



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Protect Environmental President Richard Cameron says, "This line of work is hard, dangerous and extremely exciting."