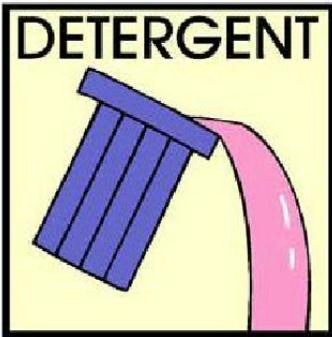


Detergent Death

Since 2009, Exit has received requests for information on the so-called ‘Detergent Suicide’ method of ending one’s life. While answers were provided to those asking the questions, it was not thought necessary to include details of the method in *The Peaceful Pill Handbook*.



This decision has been reviewed in 2011 and this chapter included. We stress however that the method scores poorly on the Exit RP test, and has little to recommend it. It is in effect a cheap and nasty suicide strategy, and readers are advised to consider other better alternatives outlined in this book.

Detergent Death

The Method

The method makes use of the toxic nature of the gas hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) and its ease of generation from readily available (unrestricted) household chemicals. Hydrogen Sulfide (commonly known as ‘rotten egg gas’) is extremely toxic when inhaled.

The mechanism of action is similar to that of hydrogen cyanide where the gas binds with and destroys the function of mitochondria within living cells. The gas is as toxic as hydrogen cyanide, but accidental exposure is uncommon because of the strong and unpleasant smell noted with even the smallest concentrations of the gas.

Concentrations of over 0.1% (1000ppm) will lead to immediate loss of consciousness and rapid death. Production of the gas in a confined space (with levels in excess of 1%) will cause certain death.



Fig 8.1 Simple ingredients used in Detergent Suicide

Production of the Gas

The gas is easily produced using readily available ingredients. The usual method employed is to add a concentrated acid to an inorganic sulfide. For example adding concentrated hydrochloric acid to calcium sulfide leads to the rapid production of the gas.



The sulfide used in the early spate of Japanese suicides was reported as ‘bath sulphur’ a product used as a supplement added to bath water for therapeutic use. In western countries where there is little interest in sulphur baths, the commonest source of sulfides is the readily available ‘Lime Sulphur’ used as a common fungicide and insecticide by home gardeners. The major ingredient is calcium polysulfide (CaS_x) in aqueous solution.

The addition of a strong acid to Lime Sulphur liquid in a plastic bucket results in the copious production of hydrogen sulfide gas. Common acids that release the gas include hydrochloric acid (HCl) available from hardware stores, and used as a paving, brick or toilet bowl cleaner, or as a swimming pool chemical, where it is used to lower the pH of the pool. An alternative acid that can be used is sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4) (See Chapter 6) which is used in vehicle lead acid batteries.

Detergent Death

Problems with the method

While the ingredients required to make the gas are readily obtained, and unrestricted, the use of the gas to end one's life presents a number of significant problems. Of major concern is the risk to others when large amounts of hydrogen sulfide gas are produced. Apart from the likelihood of annoying everyone in the area with the stink, there are real dangers to those who might try to enter the area or attempt resuscitation. Indeed emergency personnel are trained to be careful entering an area where this gas is suspected, and not to attempt mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Clearly if one is planning to use this method it is essential that a site is chosen where leakage of the gas can not endanger innocent people and prominent warning signs should be displayed. The use of a car parked in an outdoor location with warning signs displayed prominently on the windows would seem to be the most responsible choice.

While it has been reported that as the concentration of the gas rises, there is a rapid inhibition of the sense of smell, so that one does not necessarily experience the sickening stench right to the point of death, it could not be considered a particularly peaceful.

The Exit RP Test for Hydrogen Sulphide (H₂S)

The method scores poorly for Peacefulness (P=3), but high on Reliability (R=10).

Considering the minor criteria:

Availability & Speed score well at 5/5, Preparation & Storage at 4/5.

However on Safety and Detectability, only the lowest score would be appropriate, giving a total score of only 31 (62%).

Detergent Death

The RP test for Hydrogen Sulphide (H₂S)

Criteria	Score
<i>Reliability</i>	<i>10/10</i>
<i>Peacefulness</i>	<i>3/10</i>
<i>Availability</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Preparation</i>	<i>4/5</i>
<i>Undetectability</i>	<i>0/5</i>
<i>Speed</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Safety</i>	<i>0/5</i>
<i>Storage</i>	<i>4/5</i>
Total	31 (62%)