



## Health Protection Agency

Chemical Hazards and Poisons Division (London)

London

WC1V 7PP

24 Hr Tel: 0870 606 4444

### Acute Chemical Incidents– Basic checklist

1. Questions to Ask the Notifying Organisation
2. Recommendations for acute phase response
3. Recommendations for incident investigation (post-acute phase response)
4. Post incident questions for public health

#### 1. Questions to ask the notifying organisation

**For all chemical incidents** request a brief summary of what is known **NOW** about the chemical incident.

- **What** has happened? Is it a fire, explosion, spill, leak, etc?
- **Where & when** did it happen?
- **What media** has it affected? e.g. air, water, land, food
- **What** is the **source** of contamination? Could it be a **deliberate release**?
  - Consider establishing a JHAC for deliberate releases
  - Has the contaminant been safely contained or removed?
- **What** is known about the **contaminating substance**?
  - specific name(s)
  - composition
  - concentrations

Information Collected\*


#### **You may need the following additional information:**

- Have any adverse health effects been reported following exposure or have there been any complaints?
  - What symptoms have been reported? (May have been reported to local authority, GPs, A & E departments, water utility etc.)
- How many people have actually &/or potentially been exposed & to what contaminant concentrations?
  - Has the Ambulance Service been alerted? Have they received any casualties?
  - Have local hospitals been alerted? Have they received any casualties?
  - Do A&E departments have adequate PPE & decontamination facilities?
  - Do A&E departments have appropriate antidotes & an adequate supply?


**\*Key:**

√= Yes

X = No

? = Information awaited

NA= Not applicable



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**2. Recommendations for acute phase response**

**Information to obtain/confirm from other agencies**

- Ensure appropriate agencies are taking steps to prevent further contamination
- Ensure access to affected area is restricted to minimise exposure
- Ensure relevant Local Authority, Environment Agency & water company (if appropriate) personnel are informed; take contact details
- Establish clear lines of responsibility & communication
- Establish whether any environmental samples been taken?
  - What sampling strategy has been used, e.g. sampling frequency, priority analyses? (if possible identify peaks & troughs in the analytical results)
- Consider convening a multi-agency incident control meeting
- Consider issuing a press release to local press & media – remember to have alternative versions in appropriate language


**Action to protect the health of the public:**

- Alert DCHP as soon as you are aware of the incident; pass on as many details as possible
- Define affected population, & monitor symptoms & disease levels – mark on a map or geographical information system
  - Are any additional populations at risk?
  - Have appropriate actions to protect public health been taken?
  - consider sheltering (*'go in, stay in, tune in'*) versus evacuation (consider & advise on risks of evacuation)
- Review potential adverse health effects of the chemical & methods of control
- Provide information to the public as needed
- Consider setting up a help line to provide assistance
- Consider referring to health emergency plan & ensure key staff members are notified
- Consider alerting GPs, NHS Direct, NHS & private hospitals, neighbouring CCDC & other medical professionals
- Consider informing Food Standards Agency/DEFRA if there is a threat to food or agriculture
- Consider informing the Regional Director of Public Health (RDPH), or the Regional Epidemiologist (RE).




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**3. Recommendations for incident investigation (post-acute phase response) - Information to obtain/confirm from other agencies**

- Confirm that the chemical hazard initially identified is the **actual** chemical hazard
- Identify source-pathway-receptor linkages
  - Is there an aquifer used for drinking water abstraction?
  - Are there plastic water supply pipes?
  - Is there a river or stream used for recreational purposes?
  - Is the land used to grow food?
  - Are there other contaminant transport pathways?
- Obtain notification for each organisation involved on when incident is declared over and when they are standing down
- Obtain updates on incident evolution and any secondary contamination
- Undertake detailed site assessment
  - collect maps and plans of the area
  - establish topography and direction of groundwater flow
  - collect further environmental samples
  - compare any measured concentrations with regulatory standards and any past sample results, e.g. from routine sampling
- Obtain any plume modelling (real time or after event) data

**Action to protect the health of the public:**

- Re-evaluate incident category
- Ensure appropriate remedial action has been undertaken to remove source of contamination or exposure pathway 
  - once confirmed, no further action required
  - go to 'post incident questions'
- Consider conducting a site visit
- Undertake further assessment of health impact
  - consider whether biological sampling of sentinel cases and other exposed individuals is necessary
  - consider carrying out a questionnaire survey of all those exposed to identify any adverse health effects
  - if necessary, initiate a case control study to assess health impacts
  - consider long-term follow up and monitoring of the exposed population

