

Prepared in the framework of the
Inter-Agency Coordination Group for
Industrial and Chemical Accidents

International efforts for industrial and chemical accidents prevention, preparedness and response





Contents

1. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Industrial and Chemical Accidents	3
2. Preface	4
3. Terminology	6
4. International tools and support for industrial and chemical accident prevention, preparedness and response	7
Policy Guidance for the Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Chemical Accidents – OECD	8
Addressing the Transboundary Effects of Accidents – UNECE	10
From disasters to success – The EU policy on major-accident hazards	13
Supporting Prevention and Preparedness at the local and national levels – UN Environment	15
Mobilizing international partners for environmental emergency response and preparedness –JEU	18
International Health Regulations and the Public Health Management of Chemical Incidents – WHO	20
A new framework for disaster risk reduction – UNISDR	22
Chemical safety and security programmes – International Cooperation Branch, OPCW	24
Providing Specific Expertise for the Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Accidents – EPSC	26
5. Learning from accidents: eMARS as an example of collaboration between international organizations	27
6. Challenges ahead in the prevention, preparedness and response to industrial and chemical accidents	28
7. How to contact the organizations	29



1 The Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Industrial and Chemical Accidents

This brochure has been prepared by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Industrial and Chemical Accidents. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group is an informal forum that brings together international organizations and institutions working on prevention of, preparedness for and response to industrial and chemical accidents.

The Inter-Agency Coordination Group aims to:

- Strengthen international cooperation for improving the prevention of, preparedness for and response to chemical and industrial accidents
- Improve the use of resources and avoid potential duplication of work across the agencies
- Facilitate understanding and coordination of the programmes of each agency
- Carry a common message to the international community on the importance of the prevention, preparedness and response to chemical accidents as being among the key elements associated with the sound management of chemicals.

Regular participants in the group include representatives of the European Commission, the United Nations Environment Programme / United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Joint Environment Unit, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization. The European Process Safety Centre also participates as an observer, providing expertise on specific topics.

This brochure aims to present the specificities of the work of these international organizations and institutions for the prevention of, preparedness for and response to chemical and industrial accidents. It also gives examples of joint activities across the organizations.

2

Preface

Over the past decades, successive major accidents, from the deadly toxic gas release in Bhopal, India in 1984 to the Buncefield fire in the United Kingdom in 2005, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, and the Bento Rodriguez dam disaster in Brazil in 2015, have caused deaths, numerous injuries, significant environmental pollution and massive economic loss. While high-profile accidents raise concerns with the public, stakeholders and regulators, there are even more accidents occurring each year which do not make international headlines. The hundreds of chemical accidents that go unnoticed every year still cause severe harm to workers, communities, municipalities, businesses and the environment leading to an overall deterioration in the quality of life. Recovering from industrial accidents sets back development gains, takes time and is expensive. Many places still suffer from events that happened years before and there are the families and severely injured for which time offers no recovery at all.

UN Environment's "Global Chemicals Outlook" highlights an increasing "chemical intensification of the economy". While industrialised countries still account for the bulk of the world chemical production, the production, use and disposal of chemicals is steadily spreading to developing

countries and countries with economies in transition. From 2012 to 2020, chemicals production is expected to grow by 46% in Asia Pacific, 40% in Africa and the Middle East, and 33% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Developing countries and countries in transition are often at particular risk of adverse effects from chemical accidents because of limited regulations or incomplete enforcement of existing rules, reduced awareness of risks and preventive measures, and inadequate resources for prevention, preparedness and response.

Improvements in technical knowledge and management systems help to reduce risk. At the same time, the great diversity in hazardous production processes, the evolution of technology, and the dynamics of the marketplace, signify an ongoing need for vigilance and identification of emerging risks, as well as a need to implement new solutions to address risk. Sustainable chemicals management offers opportunities to advance the sustainable development goals. At the same time, the risks associated with chemicals use must be managed so that the risk of chemical and industrial accidents is reduced. In this, international collaboration for the prevention, preparedness and response to industrial accidents is imperative.



3 Terminology

For the following terms there is no generic definition across all instruments referred to in this brochure. However, in general they can be described as follows:



Chemical accident

A chemical accident is any unplanned event involving hazardous substances that cause, or is liable to cause, harm to health, the environment, or property. This excludes any long-term events (such as chronic pollution).



Preparedness

Preparedness is focusing on measures to allow for appropriate reaction to an accident. Examples include development of accident preparedness plans, early warning measures, communication with the public, and emergency exercises.



Prevention

Prevention generally includes the aspects of managing, operating, and controlling a hazardous installation, from its conception to its decommissioning/demolition. Prevention is



Response

Response is addressing all the actions to be taken once an accident has occurred or there is an imminent threat of an accident, including mitigating adverse effects on health, the environment and

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