

CASE STUDY

Successful collaborative multi-agency approach to deliver on the WHO Chemicals Road Map in New Zealand

New Zealand

New Zealand has comprehensive legislation and functional arrangements to manage chemical risks and respond to chemical events. Responding sectors include emergencies services, government agencies and public health units.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the project is to develop an approach for timely detection of and effective response to potential chemical risks and/or events, based on collaboration with different sectors responsible for chemical safety.

Project Overview

Context

New Zealand has numerous agencies that operate under their own acts, legislation and policies to enforce, mitigate, remedy and avoid chemical risks, and to respond to chemical events.

The Ministry of Health is responsible for minimizing harm to the public from exposure to hazardous substances, products and activities under the Health Act (1956). The Ministry also has a compliance and enforcement role under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act (1996). The statutory duties are overseen by the Ministry but undertaken by staff and health professionals at the local and regional levels, often working in conjunction with other government agencies and their associated acts, playing their own roles in the safe management of chemicals.

Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) leads any emergency responses to a chemical event. It operates under the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act (2017) and provides the regulatory framework for managing chemical and hazardous substances events. WorkSafe – the agency that regulates workplace health and safety – is responsible for maintaining chemical storage and worker safety, including that of first responders in an emergency event. Another key agency is the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), which is the primary regulator for hazardous substances in order to safeguard people and the environment. The EPA also approves the importation and manufacture of chemical substances, and takes responsibility for the numerous treaties to which New Zealand is a signatory.



Approach

The Ministry of Health and other agencies responsible for the sound management of chemicals in New Zealand undertake regular and effective communication during “everyday work”. The conventional communication approach is implemented, which includes regular meetings between agencies, e-mails with updates and discussions around pieces of work, peer review of papers and guidelines, networking with peers and exchanging of comments on legislative design and draft policy documents.

The Ministry uses the National Hazmat Public Health Emergency Response Plan for any emergency involving chemicals or hazardous substances. The successful approach has been to develop a guidance document to which other agencies have contributed and which is continuously refined and improved after events. The Ministry is an active member of the National Hazardous Substances Coordinating Committee. This Committee includes representatives from all key agencies working together to achieve timely detection of and effective response to potential chemical risks and/or events.

Results

The collaborative approach means expert advice relating to the management and effects of chemicals and hazardous substances can be freely obtained from any government agency as well as from nongovernmental organizations, national research institutions and universities.

Having a collaborative approach has ensured clear legislation, structure and processes to detect, mitigate, minimize and avoid chemical events that pose environmental, workplace or public health risks. The WHO Joint External Evaluation for New Zealand noted the strength of having a clearly defined single lead agency (FENZ) for responding to hazmat events, with support systems in place with other key agencies.

Lessons Learned

Continual improvement and refining of the collaborative multi-agency approach are key when there are many different pieces of legislation and policy, as well as agencies that have a role in the management of chemicals and hazardous substances.

The case study was authored by the Ministry of Health of New Zealand. The named authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this publication.

Recommendations

Formulating action and response plans in collaboration with other agencies has been key in developing a collaborative approach for the timely detection of and effective response to potential chemical risks and/or events.

We also recommend open communications to build effective relationships with other agencies. Simple means of communication taking this approach have been the most efficient.

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