

7 General principles for response

This chapter provides general principles on the roles and responsibilities of industry and public authorities in responding to chemical accidents. Response activities should consist primarily of implementing the emergency plans, assuming that the planning process was complete and effective.

Systems should be in place to immediately alert response personnel in the event of a chemical accident or an imminent threat of an accident, which would require their involvement.

- This alerting of response personnel should trigger the implementation of the emergency plan.
- These systems should also inform the management that an accident or imminent threat of an accident has occurred.

In the event of a chemical accident, stakeholders should take all reasonable measures to minimise exposure of people and the environment to hazardous substances and to limit adverse effects on health, the environment and property. This shall include all hazardous substances involved, including those generated in the accident or resulting from the emergency response such as firewater.

In the event of an accident, systems should be activated to warn the members of the public who might be affected by the accident. Spokespersons designated to communicate to the public (including those from industry and public authorities) should have the necessary information, as far as it is available, skills, authority and credibility to effectively carry out this task.

- Official spokespersons should be as open as possible in providing information during and after an accident
- In this regard, they should, for example, be timely in presenting information, admit when information is not available, avoid making promises which cannot be fulfilled and ensure that the messages provided are consistent with actions taken.

Co-operation mechanisms should be established between responders at all levels of response. This should ensure that clear communication pathways and a common language between the response partners are defined.

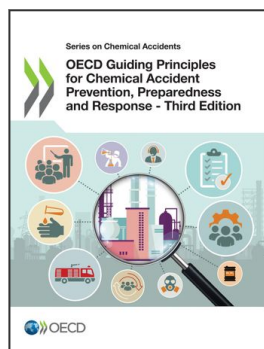
Communication at a personal level, where possible, should be encouraged. This should involve commanders and their units who are to be expected to respond together in particular scenarios.

From the prepared response plan and early stages of the response, considerations should be made with regard to post-accident clean-up and recovery and the transition to these phases. During the transition between emergency response operations and clean-up and recovery activities, all those involved should co-operate and exchange information to maintain safety and protect and/or restore the environment and property.

Once an incident is under control and no longer presents an acute risk to human health, to the environment or of serious property damage then the emergency response will end. This should be a decision taken by the incident commander following consultation with all relevant response organisations.

- At this point, response organisations will begin to withdraw from the incident site and the site will be handed over to those responsible for the investigation, securing the site and initiating clean-up and restitution.
- The handover process should be documented as responsibilities move from one agency to the next. In particular, consideration should be given to the possibility that the overall responsibility for the site moves from emergency responders to authorities responsible for criminal investigations and other enforcement roles.

Following a chemical accident, the response should be reviewed and lead to feedback into the emergency response planning cycle.



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