

Reader's guide

These Guiding Principles have been prepared as part of the OECD Programme on Chemical Accidents and within the framework of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). Their aim is to set out general guidance for the safe planning and operation of installations where there are hazardous substances in order to **prevent** accidents and, recognising that accidents may nonetheless occur, to **mitigate adverse effects** through effective **emergency preparedness and accident response**.

Objective

This revised third edition of the Guiding Principles aims to be a reference for public authorities, industry and other stakeholders to ensure a strong chemical accidents programme that takes into account the latest good practices and advances in the field of prevention, preparedness and response. The Guiding Principles will also serve as a reminder of the key elements of process safety as accidents often happen with similar causes and could have been prevented “just” with basic process safety in place.

This revised third edition takes into account new vocabulary used in the field and reflects on lessons learnt from major accidents worldwide since the second edition was published in 2003 as well as emerging issues linked to the 4th Industrial Revolution, climate change adaptation and the response to unexpected crises for example.

These Guiding Principles are the technical guidance underlying the application of the OECD Decision-Recommendation of the Council concerning Chemical Accident Prevention, Preparedness and Response consolidated in 2023.¹ They can be used in conjunction with the IOMC Toolbox Chemical Accidents Scheme that provides a complementary step-by-step approach to the development of a chemical accidents programme based on a country's available resources.²

The principles take into account and are consistent with other international regulatory instruments and guidance materials relevant to chemical accident prevention, preparedness and response. These include instruments and guidance materials prepared in connection with the European Union (EU) Seveso III Directive, the UNEP Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level (APELL) programme and Flexible Framework, International Labour Organization conventions and recommendations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) conventions, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) frameworks, World Health Organization (WHO) regulations and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). They contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Scope

For the purpose of this publication, a **chemical accident** refers to any unintentional event, such as a release, fire or explosion at a hazardous installation, involving hazardous substances, that has the potential

to cause harm to human health, the environment or property. This also covers chemical accidents triggered by the effects of natural hazards.

This publication seeks to address the wide range of measures necessary to ensure effective chemical safety, in particular to:

- Minimise the likelihood that an accident will occur (**prevention**).
- Mitigate consequences of accidents through emergency planning, land-use planning and risk communication (**preparedness/mitigation**).
- Limit the adverse consequences to health, the environment and property in the event of an accident (**response**).
- Learn from the experiences of accidents (**follow-up**) in order to reduce the number and impact of future accidents.

These Guiding Principles do not include long-term clean-up and restoration following an accident, nor do they address long-term events, such as chronic pollution from hazardous substances. However, the issues addressed herein are closely related to other aspects of environmental protection, occupational and public health, and sustainable development.

Parties addressed

The Guiding Principles **principally focus on providing guidance to industry and public authorities**. They also contain a dedicated section on communication with **the public** (see Figure 1).

Industry

Since the primary responsibility for the safety of hazardous installations rests with those who own and operate such installations, the largest part of this publication is devoted to the roles and responsibilities of industry. Industry is defined to include owners/shareholders/operators of relevant enterprises (whether private or public entities), management, other employees and contractors working with the installation. In this publication:

- The word “management” should be read to include anyone with decision-making responsibility for the enterprise, including owners and managers; this includes onsite management and management at the corporate level.
- The word “employee” is defined as any individual(s) working at or on behalf of a hazardous installation, including both management and labour, as well as (sub)contractors.
- The word “labour” includes any individual(s) working at or on behalf of a hazardous installation who is not part of management.

For purposes of this publication, government agencies that operate hazardous installations (e.g. wastewater treatment facilities, transport interfaces or chemical warehouses) should be considered “industry”.

Public authorities

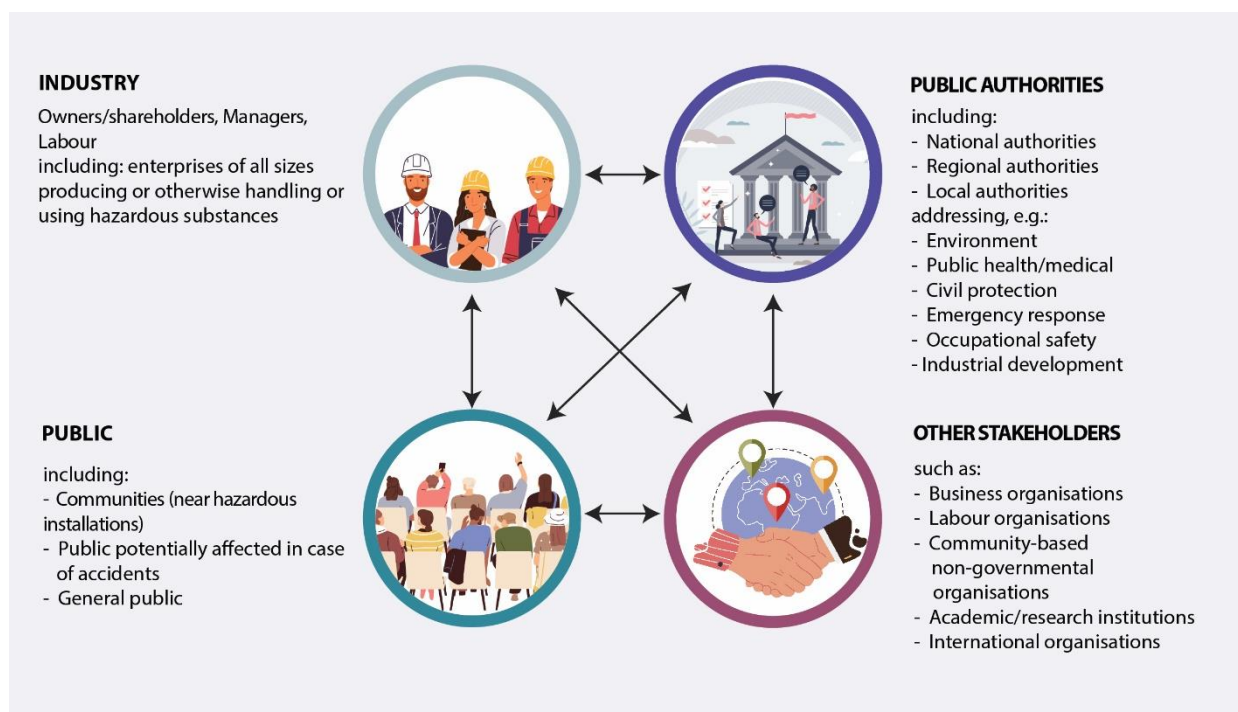
- The Guiding Principles include guidance related to the roles and responsibilities of public authorities at all levels that are involved in the many disciplines inherent in chemical accident prevention, preparedness and response (e.g. environment, public health, occupational health and safety, civil defence, industrial development, international relations). This guidance is relevant to

regulatory/enforcement authorities (at the national, regional and local levels), emergency response personnel, public health authorities, medical providers and other types of government agencies.

The public

- The Guiding Principles also address the role of the public, both in general and more specifically the members of the local community near a hazardous installation and those potentially affected in the event of an accident. The focus is on the provision of and access to information concerning the hazardous installation and emergency preparedness and response, as well as on public participation in decision making related to hazardous installations.

Figure 1. Stakeholders addressed in the Guiding Principles



Installations covered

The Guiding Principles apply to fixed installations at which hazardous substances are produced, processed, handled, stored, used or disposed of in such a form and quantity that there might be a risk of occurrence of a chemical accident (called “hazardous installations” in this publication). The principles do not generally address the transport of hazardous substances but cover pipelines and transport interfaces such as marshalling yards and port areas.

Accidents involving the release of radioactive materials or biological matter have not been addressed in this publication. However, the Guiding Principles do address accidents involving chemicals that have been produced at nuclear facilities and by biological processes. Furthermore, many of the principles described in this publication also apply in the context of nuclear and biotechnology installations. Certain aspects of the Guiding Principles do not apply to military facilities to the extent that this might compromise national security.

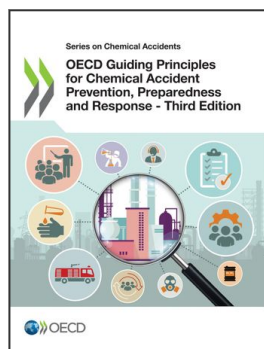
Use

The Guiding Principles have purposely been drafted to allow **flexibility in their application**, so that users can choose the relevant provisions and adapt them in light of their particular circumstances, including the local culture, legal context, nature of the risks and the extent and type of resources available. In this regard, it should be recognised that not all provisions will apply in all circumstances. The publication also tries to achieve a balance between guidance that is general and flexible and, at the same time, sufficiently specific and detailed so that it will be a valuable resource to decision makers.

Notes

¹ See <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0490>

² See <https://iomctoolbox.org/> for more information.



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