

ASHT Phase II Alerting System for Chemical Health Threats

ASHT

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Background

There is no standardised format or protocol for issuing alerts about chemical incidents across EU Member States or individual countries. To address this gap the European Union Public Health Programme funded a project (completed September 2008) to develop an Alerting System and Health surveillance system for the deliberate release of chemicals by Terrorists' (ASHT I). The project established a Rapid Alert System for CHEMical incidents (RAS-CHEM) based on protocols and operating procedures originally developed for the EC Early Warning and Response System for Communicable Diseases (EWRS). Clinical symptoms associated with exposure to twenty chemicals were researched to develop syndromes for each agent, with a specific focus on chemicals likely to be used in a deliberate release.

ASHT I established the concept of setting up a rapid alert system and envisaged the structure required for a successful rapid Alerting System for chemical Health Threats (ASHT II). This second phase of the project will improve upon the current data transfer systems and information sharing and will involve developing mechanisms (and strategies) for analysing and reporting information between health professionals, from poisons centres to national public health officials.

Project Description

RAS-CHEM will be extended and developed into a health monitoring system for chemical health threats. The list of high risk chemical agents currently covered by the system will be harmonised and extended. A new web-based forum to enable EU Poisons Centres to exchange information about chemical incidents will be developed and tested. The EU Poisons Centres Forum (EUPC Forum) will be integrated into the RAS-CHEM framework to enable rapid and effective cross border communication about potential public health threats. Escalation of events from the EUPC Forum to RAS-CHEM will be established via a robust reporting protocol involving national public health officials. Stakeholders, end-users and collaborating partners will be integral in developing each component of the system throughout the project providing both steer and advice.

Project Objectives

- To improve the speed and effectiveness of the public health response to acute and potentially chronic effects following chemical incidents or emergencies.
- To develop an EUPC Forum that will function as a rapid communication and information exchange platform between EU Poisons Centres.
- To further develop RAS-CHEM and incorporate the EUPC Forum as an integral component of RAS-CHEM that will be part of the assembly of EU rapid alert systems.
- To engage national health ministries and public health authorities to provide steer and comment on their core information requirements for reporting events to RAS-CHEM.
- To develop a consensually agreed classification system of toxic substances based on substance use and toxicity, that is common to all EU Poisons Centres.
- To develop and incorporate harmonised terminology of symptoms and syndromes that would signal the possible release or exposure to toxic chemicals.
- To test and develop an IT infrastructure for automatic online data collection from Poisons Centres.

Project Partners

Health Protection Agency, UK (Main Beneficiary).
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, UK.
European Association of Poison Centres and Clinical Toxicologists.
Universitaetsmedizin Goettingen GIZ-Nord Poisons Centre, Germany.
Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Lille, France.
General Faculty Hospital Prague, Toxicological Information Centre, Czech Republic.
Health Emergency Situations Centre, Lithuania.

Collaborating Partners

World Health Organization (WHO)
National Poisons Information representation from Nordic countries (Norway);
Centro de Informacao Antivenenosa (Portugal); Department of Health (UK);
Health Emergency Situation Centre (Lithuania); Ministry of Health (Czech Republic); BICHAT representatives (Germany and France); Poisons Information Centre (Ireland).

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Further Information

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