The disaster at Chernobyl, USSR, has caused a major crisis of confidence in nuclear safety, and highlighted the need for comprehensive contingency planning for — and emergency response to — such accidents. This report gives practical guidance on how the authorities should deal with an accident in any type of nuclear installation, whether it involves accidental releases to the air or into water. It is based on principles developed in a previous WHO report published in 1984.

It summarizes the range of accidents for which plans need to be made to protect the public, the measures to be taken and the levels of dose at which they should be applied. It indicates how to measure the levels of exposure and what are the most likely routes of exposure. It then outlines the problems faced by public health authorities and medical practitioners, and the administrative arrangements that will have to be made. The example used is of a standard pressurized light water reactor of the type currently used for electricity generation, but many of the features will be common to other nuclear installations as well.

This report is addressed to those organizations and individuals responsible for public health in the event of a nuclear accident. It will also be of use to those medical practitioners who are not administratively responsible in an accident, but who may need to be aware of the consequences and of the action to be taken in the aftermath of an accident. Coordination is vital between the public health administration and the organizations with direct responsibilities in the event of an accident, and this report is essential reading for them all.

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