**WORKSHOP ON**
**THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC AND**
**ON THE ROLE OF WORKERS IN ACCIDENT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

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**OECD ad hoc Group of Experts**
**on Accidents Involving Hazardous Substances**

# CONCLUSIONS

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The attached conclusions were derived from the discussions at the Workshop. They have not been adopted by the ad hoc Group and therefore are not necessarily the views of the OECD or its Member countries.

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE SESSIONS ON PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

The premise of the first three sessions of the Workshop on "Provision of Information to the Public" was based on the OECD Council Act C(88)85 "concerning the provision of information to the public and public participation in decision-making processes related to the prevention of, and response to, accidents involving hazardous substances". In that Act, Member countries concluded that the potentially affected public had a right to, as well as a need for, information regarding hazardous installations, and therefore agreed that such information would be provided. Recognizing, also, that many countries have their own regulations and/or directives on this subject, the objective of the first part of the Workshop was to focus on the practical aspects of implementing these requirements for the provision of information. Several common observations and conclusions emerged. These are organized in the following categories:

Development of a communication strategy: This section elaborates the key elements which should be considered when developing a specific approach, within a particular community, for providing information to the public concerning hazardous installations.

Communication process: This section describes the implementation of the communication strategy to ensure the information is effectively disseminated during the following four stages:

i) before an installation is built;
ii) once an installation is in operation (accident preparedness);
iii) at the time of an accident; and
iv) following an accident.

Keys to success: Given the participants' experiences, several critical elements that promoted the effectiveness of communications were identified.

### A. DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1. Effective communication is the key to public understanding of the potential adverse effects of possible major accidents at planned or existing hazardous installations and to ensuring appropriate action by the potentially affected public should an accident occur. Effective communication must be clear, credible and consistent.

2. To ensure effective communication, a strategy for an installation or group of installations must be developed to define for all four stages of the communication process, the objectives of providing information, what information is to be provided to whom, and how to provide information effectively. The strategy must specifically address the particular characteristics of the installations, the potential accidental releases and the communities concerned. Flexibility must be built into the strategy, particularly with respect to providing information at the time of an accident, in order to deal with unexpected occurrences and lack of complete information.

3. The basic components of a communication strategy include, but are not limited to, a determination of:

- The nature and extent of the potential off-site effects. To make this determination, a facility risk* and consequence analysis should be done. To define the nature of the potential off-site effects, information on chemical properties is essential, especially regarding delayed and long-term effects after acute exposure;

- The potentially affected population. Models are available to assist in defining the geographic areas where the population may be affected in the event of an accident, for various types of installation failures assuming various metereological conditions;

- The various target audiences to receive the communications. Consideration should be given to, for example, particularly susceptible or sensitive groups (such as schoolchildren and hospital patients), transient populations, demographics of the potentially affected public, cultural variations, etc.;

- The parties who should be involved in the development of the communication strategy, in the drafting of the messages and in the provision of the information. Planning should not be limited to planners, but should include government officials at different levels, industry (managers, workers and their representatives), media, politicians, health officials, public interest groups, emergency response teams and other experts as well as members of the general public;

- The specific messages to be provided for the four stages of the communication process**. In developing the messages to be delivered, the needs and perceptions of recipient audiences should be taken into account. Such factors as culture, socio-economic status, family situation, sex and age must be considered;

* For this paper, "risk" is defined as the likelihood of a specified undesired event occurring within a specified period and/or under specified circumstances.

** According to the Council Act, information to be provided to the public should include at a minimum:

- specific information on appropriate behaviour and safety measures they should adopt in the event of an accident involving hazardous substances;
- general information on the nature, extent and potential off-site effects on human health or the environment of possible major accidents at planned or existing hazardous installations;
- other information needed to understand the nature of the possible effects of an accident and to be able to contribute effectively to decisions concerning hazardous installations and the development of community emergency preparedness plans.

- Credible and capable communicators, specific to the relevant community in order to identify who should be given responsibility for communication with the public. In the strategy, those with responsibility for communication should be clearly identified and they should be provided with the resources necessary to carry out their tasks;

- Appropriate channels of communication for particular messages at the four stages of information provision. Mechanisms for information dissemination must be explicitly designated, designed to ensure two-way communications and tested to ensure communications are indeed received as intended.

B. THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS
(Implementation of the communication strategy)

4. Information concerning siting and operation of hazardous installations should be provided to inform the community about the installation operations and potential hazardous situations, to allow for community participation in government decision-making concerning hazardous installations, as well as for warning and response purposes.

5. The effectiveness of information provided prior to an accident will determine the extent to which the affected population understands the warnings and directions given immediately following an accident and responds appropriately. Since warning and response communication needs to be started immediately following an accident, all necessary resources must be available and systems tested in advance so that the potentially affected public is able to recognize warning signals and information. Information should be provided continuously throughout the emergency, and efforts should be made to check the understanding of the message as it becomes available. Credibility can be lost within 24 hours of an accident if such information is not forthcoming or is inaccurate; this loss of credibility is very difficult to restore.

6. Effective communication requires co-ordinated involvement of a number of relevant parties, such as local response officials, corporate spokespeople, worker representatives, elected officials, community representatives, public authorities at all levels, health officials, technical experts and the media. The duties of these parties should be established in the communication strategy to ensure consistent and comprehensive communication.

7. For communication to be effective, messengers delivering information must be carefully selected from among the parties described above, have the necessary knowledge and skills, and be viewed as having authority and credibility. To maintain credibility, particularly during an emergency, the designated spokespeople should admit when information is not available, avoid making promises that cannot be fulfilled, be the first to give bad news and ensure that actions taken are consistent with the messages provided.

8. The media are a primary conduit of information to the general public. Media representatives should be involved in the communication process and be provided with relevant background information by operators and response officials. In order to aid communication following an accident, the media should have been given, before an accident, information concerning emergency preparedness and response and subsequent to an accident have easy access to those officials with relevant information concerning the accident.

9. Workers at hazardous installations should play an important role in communication with the general public. They have a hands-on knowledge about the installation and the process and therefore can help in communication planning and serve as credible sources of information. They have a strong incentive to ensure the continuing safe operation of the facility and have a vested interest in protecting themselves and their families.

10. In developing the message, it is critical to recognise how the information will be perceived taking into account the stress associated with an emergency situation. For example, men and women have been found to respond differently to certain types of information; and natural instincts may cause parents to try to be reunited with their children in an emergency even if this may create greater dangers. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that target audiences respond appropriately to the messages.

11. Messages should be clear, vivid and provide appropriate and comprehensive information without being overwhelming. Care should be taken not to underestimate the ability of the public to deal with information and not to talk down to the public. Generally the public can be expected to follow clear and sensible instructions

12. In defining the target audience for information, natural community groupings or boundaries should be used to avoid disseminating different information among members of the same community.

13. In the aftermath of an accident, specific care should be given to providing information related to the psychological, social and economic impacts and legal implications of the accident on victims, their families and the community.

14. The approaches used for risk communication in developed countries cannot be transferred wholesale to developing countries. To ensure the equivalent quality of the communication -- i.e., that the information provided is accurate, comprehensive and understood -- is maintained, the approaches must take into account such differences as social and family structures, religious influences, resource limitations and available technology.

## C. KEYS TO SUCCESS

15. Successful communication with the public is based on a multi-source input, is directed at multi-faceted populations and uses a multi-media approach for dissemination of information.

16. Information concerning the potential adverse effects of hazardous installations must be shared openly and actively and should be correct, credible, comprehensive and consistent. Failure to provide information or appear credible will inevitably lead to damaging rumours and the emergence of self-appointed "experts" to provide comments to the media.

17. Attention should be given to special groups (e.g., elderly, school children) within the area potentially affected in the event of an accident, to ensure special messages are developed and relevant individuals understand their responsibilities. For example, teachers need to be specifically trained in view of their critical responsibility at the time of an accident and in order to reassure parents that their children will be well taken care of in the event of an emergency. In addition, children should be made aware, in a way they can understand, of what to do in the event of an emergency.

18. To minimize confusion during an emergency, the mechanism for obtaining and delivering information should be as clear as possible and use, to the extent possible, known and existing channels.

19. Effective internal communication within a hazardous installation is a prerequisite for effective communication with the public.

20. Management's and workers' involvement in risk communication to the public as concerned citizens should be promoted.

21. Communicators need to be specifically trained to understand how to develop information for the target audiences and to deliver information effectively, particularly in an emergency.

22. Concerted international activities should be furthered to develop the necessary information, for example, on the properties of chemicals.

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE SESSIONS**
**ON THE ROLE OF WORKERS IN ACCIDENT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

The high level OECD Conference on Accidents Involving Hazardous Substances (February 1988) defined the roles and responsibilities of public authorities, operators and workers with respect to prevention of, and response to, accidents with off-site effects on human health or the environment. In this regard they concluded, inter alia, that "workers and their trade unions should be given every opportunity to contribute to improvement of the safety of hazardous installations". With that statement as a premise, this Workshop concentrated its efforts on specifying the roles and responsibilities of workers in preventing accidents with off-site effects.

1. Workers have a continuing role and responsibility in the prevention of accidents by carrying out their jobs in a safe manner, by supporting the ability of others to do so, and by contributing actively in the development and implementation of safety policies and practices.

2. For accident prevention and emergency preparedness activities to be effective, there must be a co-operative effort, based on openness and trust, among workers, and their representatives where they exist, management, community groups and government authorities*. Two-way channels for communication between management and workers are essential for furthering trust and confidence.

3. Top management must be fully committed to achieving safety, health and environmental protection throughout their company or group of companies, with appropriate participation by workers, and workers should support management efforts in this regard. Furthermore, employees at all levels should be accountable for carrying out their designated responsibilities. Technological controls and written procedures cannot replace poor leadership.

4. The policies and procedures related to the role of workers in accident prevention are applicable to all companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises. It may be necessary to develop special mechanisms to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in the implementation of these policies and procedures such as special funding means.

5. To help fulfill their role and responsibility, workers may require a number of instruments and structures such as unions, confederations and their international organisations. Where present, local unions provide a structure to facilitate the exercise of the worker's rights and the carrying out of their responsibilities. At the national and international level, confederations and international organisations provide expertise and information, access to political and regulatory decision-making processes and the opportunity to share experiences. Employers and governments should encourage and facilitate the ability of workers to fulfill their role and responsibility.

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* For purposes of this document, "representatives" include trade unions and other bona fide organisations of employees.

6. A proven structure for organising workers' contributions to accident prevention and emergency preparedness is the Safety Committee. The Safety Committee supports, but is not a substitute for individual and line responsibility for safety. It provides a forum for consultation on safety, health and environmental matters. At plant level, the Committee should consist of workers and managers, including those which have the authority to implement the Committee's decisions.

7. A Safety Committee should be established where it does not exist, and be consulted in matters related to safety, health and environment. Specific tasks would involve a review of safety audits and reports and of emergency plans and an analysis of accidents involving hazardous substances which had or may have had consequences inside or outside the plant. For the Safety Committee to be effective, resources should be made available to fulfill its tasks and its conclusions should be acted upon.

8. Prerequisites for the effective contribution of the Safety Committee are: the availability of comprehensive information including information on causes of accidents and incidents; the possibility of using external experts; appropriate education and training of members; and no loss of earnings for time spent in activities related to the Safety Committee.

9. In addition to plant Safety Committees, mechanisms at a corporate, sectoral national or international level might be useful to help disseminate safety information and provide an input to decision-making processes concerning accident prevention and emergency preparedness. For example, advisory committees with representatives from labour, management and public authorities could help provide input into national government policies and might contribute to international activities.

10. Another mechanism to fulfill labour's role with respect to accident prevention, in addition to Safety Committees, is the establishment of Safety Representatives at plant level. Safety Representatives, nominated by workers, should be given specific training and understanding of safety related matters and should have certain responsibilities in this respect.

11. Workers, and their representatives where they exist, have the right to comprehensive information of relevance to the prevention of, and response to, accidents involving hazardous substances. Consistent with this, mechanisms should exist to protect commercial or industrial secrets where necessary.

12. Without the risk of repercussions, a worker, and in certain cases a safety representative where he exists, should interrupt hazardous activities in a safe manner when he has reasonable justification to believe they present an imminent and serious danger to health or the environment and he should be entitled to call upon top management or public authorities in case of need to review the situation.

13. Workers, and their representatives where they exist, should participate in decision-making concerning the design of their workplace, the organisation of their activities and the staffing of the installation, to the extent that these may affect safety.

14. All parties should encourage, and management should promote, full reporting of accidents, incidents, near misses and unsafe situations. Such information should be analysed, and the conclusions of this analysis should be acted upon and used to promote safety. The concept of rewards for safety performance and lowering of accident rates can be counterproductive when they lead to under-reporting of accidents. While the idea of rewards for safety suggestions leading to safe working conditions could be acceptable, in any event safety should be for safety's sake.

15. Formal mechanisms should exist to ensure that there will be no repercussions to workers for reporting incidents, near misses and unsafe conditions and, in general, for participating in activities related to protection of health, safety and the environment. Trade unions, where they exist, can be effective in assisting workers when problems arise in this respect.

16. If certain responsibilities of management for safety are delegated to supervisory staff, such staff should receive the necessary means and training to fulfill these responsibilities.

17. Training is essential to allow workers to fulfill their responsibility to perform their job safely. Therefore, training should be given before undertaking normal duties and follow-up training should be given regularly. Training should be considered as part of the workers' job for purposes of time spent and wages.

18. Training and retraining should be broadly-based so that workers have an understanding of the whole plant process, not just specialised knowledge of their own immediate tasks and responsibilities. For training to be effective, workers and their representatives need to be involved in its development, testing and subsequent revision.

19. The cost of developing and implementing training programmes should be paid for by the employer. Training should be carried out on the job and may be supplemented by external training, e.g., through unions. Additional funding mechanisms could be explored.

20. Training is a specialised skill and every effort must be made to ensure that the trainer is a high quality communicator. In many cases, the best trainers will be workers in the plant who have first hand experience in working safely and who are more likely to enjoy the confidence of their colleagues and be able to communicate in a manner easily understood.

21. There should be mechanisms in place for ensuring that training actually works. This means paying close attention to some form of feedback system. This could include the direct job observation or more sophisticated methods such as simulation tests. Training should be modified to reflect changes in the process used, technology applied and procedures followed at the installation.

22. Subcontractors require special attention since evidence indicates that accidents are often associated with subcontracted work. Subcontracted workers should receive appropriate training prior to working in hazardous

installations. They should be required to respect the safety rules and practices of the company in which they operate as well as any additional rules and practices particular to their task. In general, subcontractor personnel should only carry out their work under the surveillance, or with the assistance, of appropriate company personnel.

23. Subcontractors should not be used to perform jobs if this could compromise safety.

24. Safety considerations should be taken into account in staffing policies. For example, temporary workers should also receive appropriate training prior to taking up their duties and receive continuing assistance, as necessary, by more experienced workers. Furthermore, overtime work should never be scheduled if this could jeopardise safety.

25. With respect to accident prevention, government should set safety objectives, with appropriate mechanisms to enforce them, and provide for worker involvement in development, implementation and enforcement of these objectives.

26. Workers, and their representatives where they exist, should be consulted by governmental agencies and international organisations in the process of developing or implementing policies for accident prevention and response, where workers have a particular interest or expertise. Tripartite mechanisms can be of special value in this process.

27. Multinational enterprises should apply equivalent policies concerning accident prevention and response and the role of workers and their representatives when operating in other OECD countries and non-OECD countries. The means for implementing these policies should be adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of the local facility. Multinational enterprises and suppliers should provide equivalent chemical process information to workers in other OECD and in non-OECD countries.

28. Member countries should provide assistance to developing countries in setting up programmes to prevent accidents. Trade unions and their international organisations may be of assistance with such programmes.