

**CHEMICAL EMERGENCIES
IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

PROPOSED POLICY, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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DISCUSSION OF TERMINOLOGY

A **chemical emergency** is defined for this document as a large scale chemical accident creating an immediate or long term public health hazard to the general public.

A listing and definition of key terms used generally in this paper include:

Policy : a general course of action to be followed by an Organization in respect to a defined area of concern.

Objective: a result or condition which is to be attained or achieved as the result of a course of action.

Strategy : a course of action intended to achieve an objective.

Short term: one to five years.

Long term : six to ten years.

PROPOSED POLICY

The proposed policy (and the consequent objectives and strategies) for PAHO in regard to Chemical Emergencies is based on the following assumptions, that:

- a) PAHO's mandate in "Emergency Preparedness and Response to Chemical Emergencies" is to provide, on request, technical cooperation and coordination in the field of health before, during, and after the emergency;
- b) PAHO itself is not and will not become an emergency response agency, i.e., its staff and resources will not be specifically targeted or assigned responsibility for use or for direct involvement in undertaking or providing on-site emergency relief operations in the case of chemical emergencies; and
- c) the response of the Organization to chemical emergencies is part of its overall response to all types of natural, technological or man-made disasters under the coordination of PED.

It is proposed that PAHO's policy in regard to Chemical Emergencies in the region should overall comprise three inter-related elements, as follows:

EMERGENCY PREVENTION POLICY

PAHO's Chemical Emergency Prevention Policy is to assist countries in the Region in the prevention of the occurrence of chemical emergencies.

(This Policy will be implemented through the activities of HPE and ECO, who will provide such assistance both directly and collaboratively with other international agencies as may be appropriate and as from time to time may be agreed upon with them.)

HEALTH PREPAREDNESS POLICY

PAHO's Chemical Emergency Health Preparedness Policy is to assist countries to improve the capability in the health sector to respond promptly and efficiently when an emergency occurs.

(This Policy will be implemented through the activities of PED in cooperation with HPE and ECO within the normal national and international frameworks for emergency preparedness for other types of disasters.)

HEALTH RESPONSE POLICY

PAHO's Chemical Emergency Health Response Policy is to assist, on request, in:

- a) the assessment of the genuine emergency health needs in the affected area,
- b) the coordination of the external health assistance, and
- c) the provision of technical cooperation/advise on public health matters.

This Policy will be implemented through concerted action by PED (coordination and mobilization) and ECO (scientific-technical advice).

PROPOSED POLICY OBJECTIVES

In respect to the three components of the proposed PAHO Policy in regard to Chemical Emergencies, it is suggested that the following objectives should be adopted:

PREVENTION OBJECTIVES

Short term: All countries of the Region should have an awareness of the existence of the types and nature of chemical risks present in their country and should have undertaken a qualitative assessment of these risks.

Long term: All countries of the Region should have:

- a) implemented programs requiring appropriate technology to be applied to the safe handling of chemicals, including transport, storage, use and disposal, and
- b) completed a quantitative assessment of the chemical risks present in the country, and should have prioritized the identified areas of major concern.

HEALTH PREPAREDNESS OBJECTIVES

Short term: All countries of the Region should have assessed emergency health preparedness needs in concert with the short term prevention objective, using existing mechanisms and institutions for emergency preparedness and other types of disasters.

Long term: All countries of the Region should have included in their overall health emergency preparedness program, a specific component for chemical emergencies including training of staff, equipment of health facilities with basic health equipment and stores, and the establishment of communications linkages in accordance with health hazards and risks.

Selected countries of the Region should have included in their overall health emergency preparedness program, an advanced capability for responding to national or, subject to resources, external chemical health emergencies, i.e., specialized medical training of personnel, establishment of advanced level health facility with specialized equipment and stores.

HEALTH RESPONSE OBJECTIVES

Short term: PAHO should have planned in detail, its role and responsibilities for chemical emergency response and should have commenced identifying and preparing its staff to carry out these responsibilities.

Long term: PAHO should have identified and prepared its staff in both HQ's and in the PWR's and identified resources from the Region to support its determined role and responsibility for chemical emergency health response in the Region.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES

The following strategies should be followed to ensure the attainment of the policy objectives:

PREVENTION

HPE and ECO should promote and enhance the general awareness of chemical hazards in the Region, acting in both "clearing house" and "producing" functions and manners, as resources permit, by continuing progressively to identify or obtain, adapt or develop, and distribute chemical safety material of a general nature. Such material should be oriented to all levels of need from lay to technical to professional to policy decision-maker.

HPE and ECO should promote the introduction of national legislation and programs for chemical risk management by seeking resources to adapt or prepare, and to publish and distribute "model" legislation and programs of national chemical risk management (avoidance and reduction) strategies based on practical experiences of other nations.

Health Preparedness

PED should produce a greater awareness at the highest policy levels in the countries, as to the need to integrate chemical disaster preparedness into overall Health Emergency Preparedness at municipal, state, and country levels.

HPE, ECO¹ AND PED should stimulate the establishment or strengthening of National Information Centers on chemical emergencies using regionally standardized data bases.

HPE, ECO¹ and PED should identify and strengthen Reference and Collaborating Centers in the Region.

PAHO should produce and distribute progressively:

- a) training material (HPE, ECO¹ and PED) for health and other responders (fire and police services, etc.) on emergency response, and
- b) guides (PED¹, HPE and ECO) on "Emergency Evacuation for Areas Exposed to Chemicals" and "Medical Response for Chemical Emergencies".

Primary responsibility.

PED¹, HPE and ECO should prepare and disseminate a "Policy and Operations Manual" for PAHO response in chemical emergencies.

PED¹, HPE and ECO should organize a training course for PAHO staff members and national health disaster coordinators in the basic concepts of preparedness and response to chemical emergencies.

RESPONSE

PED¹, HPE and ECO should progressively develop its capacity to mobilize, on request from the health sector of a country, regional expertise to advise countries on:

- a) the assessment of emergency health needs,
- b) emergency health care delivery, and
- c) the mobilization and coordination of external assistance in the health field.

PED¹, HPE and ECO should encourage countries to document and report on their experiences of chemical emergency health care response, and will provide staff to participate in such assessments when asked to do so in order to promote the exchange of experience and training.

HPE, ECO¹ and PED should promote the conducting of clinical, epidemiological and toxicological studies of chemical emergencies for the compilation of data for use in national and international data banks.

¹Primary responsibility