

## **Management of chemical incidents; experience of the New Zealand Poison Centre.**

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**Abstract:** Poison Centres have an important role in the handling of chemical incidents by providing appropriate information. They should take an active part in the contingency planning, education, and training for chemical accidents. A chemical disaster involves numerous information problems, and adequate information may significantly influence its course. Poison Centres should therefore include on their data bases information on all chemicals likely to be involved in accidents in the region, including the less frequently used industrial chemicals, reactive intermediates and related matters. Poison Centres should collect information on the toxic chemicals and their effects, vulnerable points, processes and /or activities of risk, what chemicals might be released, in what forms and quantities and possible protective and remedial measures. In New Zealand during the mid 1970's following a major chemical incident and subsequent review process, Hazardous Substances Technical Liaison Committees (HSTLC) were established in each main centre. The function of these committees is to co-ordinate certain actions in respect to chemical emergencies. The Fire Service acts as convener and membership includes agencies such as Ambulance, Ministry of Health, Department of Labour, Police, Technical expert in chemistry, Local/Territorial authority (water, electricity, environmental, hazardous substances). The NPC has been a member of the Dunedin HSTLC since its inception. Meetings are held bimonthly and a training exercise is held annually. At a national level the NPC provides advice to the HSTLCs at chemical emergencies which may include a risk assessment of the incident, advice concerning decontamination in situ and within hospitals, and first-aid measures. Additionally it may provide advice on general and specific therapy in the clinical setting and availability of antidotes. Suggested remedial measures for chemical spills are also provided. The NPC also takes an active part in education and training of Fire Service personnel for chemical emergencies. Locally members of the NPC often attend chemical incidents to provide advice or attend the central Fire Service Control HQ with other experts to evaluate chemical incident management at remote locations. As a result of these activities the NPC has with other colleagues developed a hazard management course at the University of Otago. (<http://osms.otago.ac.nz/courses/hazards/>). This is a web based distance learning programme designed to enable professionals working in the field to develop and increase their understanding of the principles and practices that guide the identification, assessment, prevention and remediation of the wide variety of physical, chemical and biological hazards impacting on today's society. The NPC is involved with teaching the [HAZX401](#) Management of Chemical Hazards and [HAZX405](#) Toxicology papers.