



21st August 1997

Dear Colleague

**NATIONAL FOCUS FOR WORK ON RESPONSE TO
CHEMICAL INCIDENTS AND SURVEILLANCE OF
HEALTH EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
CHEMICALS**

Summary

1. This letter explains the purpose and responsibilities of the unit, to be known as "The Health Effects of Chemicals National Focus", which will provide an additional resource, within the context of current local and central arrangements, for Health Boards' response to chemical incidents. It also provides details of how and when the National Focus might be accessed by Health Boards.

Background

2. It has been considered for some time that arrangements should be strengthened for the NHS response to incidents where the hazard is primarily chemical. The Department of Health in England has therefore contracted with the Welsh Combined Centres for Public Health to provide a national centralised unit to co-ordinate work in response to chemical incidents and surveillance of health effects attributed to chemicals in the environment. This unit will be known as "The Health Effects of Chemicals National Focus" and will cover England and Wales, and by virtue of an agreement with this Department, Scotland.

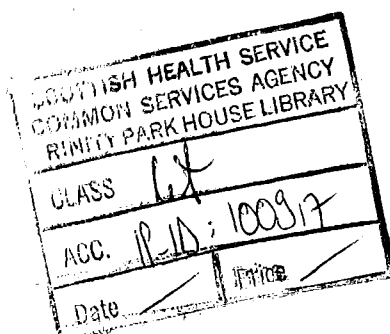
Action

3. General Managers and Trust Chief Executives are asked to ensure that the contents of the annex are drawn to the attention of appropriate managers and staff; that appropriate use is made of the expertise of the Focus; and that arrangements exist for access to the Focus through the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health.

Yours sincerely

DAVID R STEEL
Head of Health Gain

FRP03174



Addressees

For action:
General Managers. Health Boards

Chief Executives, NHS Trusts

Directors of Public Health, Health Boards

Director, SCIEH

For information:
General Manager. Common Services Agency

General Manager, State Hospitals Board for Scotland

Chief Executive, Health Education Board for Scotland

Executive Director, SCPMDE

Enquiries to:

Dr D Dixon
Public Health Policy Unit
Room 323
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

Tel: 0131-244 2779
Fax: 0131-244 2030

Mr A Oliver
Public Health Policy Unit
Room 437
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

Tel: 0131-244-2504
Fax: 0131-244-2157

COMMON SERVICES AGENCY	
RECEIVED	
22 AUG 1997	
FILE No	
REFERRED TO	ACTION TAKEN
Recycled	1800 8 11

Local Responsibility

1. It is likely that, later this year, the Management Executive will provide the Scottish Health Service with revised Emergency Planning Guidance and will include in the revision material, similar to that issued as HSG(93)38 in England, on the NHS response to chemical incidents.

2. Broadly, in its guidance the Department of Health indicates that it expects the NHS to be adequately prepared both for the treatment of casualties and for the public health response to a chemical incident. The guidance advises health authorities in England to make contractual arrangements with providers so that health boards have assured access to the information, advice and support which they may need.

3. The National Poisons Information Service (NPIS) provides information on the hazardous (or otherwise) nature of the chemicals involved in an incident and on clinical management following exposure. But more than this is needed to respond effectively to a chemical incident and health boards may not always have sufficient expertise to deal with all aspects of incidents. The level of support required would normally include a 24 hour advisory service on the public health, environmental, scientific, toxicological and epidemiological aspects of a chemical incident and also cover:

- assistance with planning, preparedness and surveillance of trends in chemical incidents;
- preparation and delivery of appropriate training courses and materials;
- sufficient familiarity with the local area and key local players to appreciate quickly the potential impact of any major incident and to advise on appropriate management strategies.

In Scotland, the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health includes within its remit the provision of advice and support, by agreement, to The Scottish Office and to Health Boards.

4. The Focus will work closely with the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) to ensure there is no duplication of effort or confusion of roles, particularly where there are incidents that cross health board boundaries.

Central Responsibility

5. The Scottish Office Department of Health has a duty to ensure that chemical incidents presenting unusual features in terms of scale, complexity or potential threat to the health of the population are identified rapidly and handled effectively. It provides national co-ordination, suggests additional sources of expertise and ensures effective liaison with other appropriate government departments, such as the Health and Safety Executive and The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department. SODoH also provides

support for health boards through the Health Advisory Group on Chemical Contamination Incidents (HAGCCI) which may be contacted through SCIEH.

6. The UK Health Departments have now devolved these central responsibilities to the Focus, which is to develop them further by:

- extending and strengthening each department's ability to respond adequately to chemical incidents and possible health effects of chemicals in the environment;
- providing a telephone contact available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year;
- providing longer term assistance to those "in the field" by promoting the development of comparable data to allow the identification of longer term health effects of environmental chemicals, promoting training and acting as a "clearing house" for information, including dissemination of "lessons learnt";
- working closely with all relevant centres of expertise to ensure that their particular strengths are drawn upon appropriately and maximised, both in routine surveillance and in advising on the management of individual incidents;
- taking on the role of activating the HAGCCI advisory system.

Management of incidents

7. Under the new arrangements, when an incident is identified which requires greater expertise than is available locally, ie the incident is considered unusual, particularly complex, likely to have a major impact on public health, or likely to attract national media attention, the health board should contact SCIEH, which will if necessary contact the Focus. The Focus will then:

- alert the Scottish Office Department of Health;
- ensure liaison with relevant sources of specialist advice in the UK and elsewhere;
- and activate, if necessary, the HAGCCI advisory system.

8. The Focus is not intended to provide a response service for chemical incidents as they occur and its existence should not be viewed by health boards as a possible alternative to putting appropriate local arrangements in place.

9. It is expected that a health board (acting through SCIEH) would involve the Focus in the handling of an individual incident only during incidents of major significance. Otherwise, information on incidents and general issues would flow to and from the Focus through regular meetings with health boards (Directors of Public Health, CPHMs, specialist

providers and others). The steering group for the work of the Focus will include representatives of the Health Departments and other interested parties.

Contacting SCIEH

10. SCIEH is contactable 24 hours a day, on:

0141 946 7120

Contacting SCIEH will also serve to alert the Department, if this is necessary. Further details on these arrangements are provided in Annex 2.

Contact list for local and central plans

11. The new arrangements are listed in Annex 2.

More information

12. More information about the work and role of the Focus is available from:

Mr Huw Bowen
Head, National Focus
Faculty of Community Health Services
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YB
Tel: 01222 506858
Fax: 01222 506803
E-mail: hjbowen@uwic.ac.uk

**NATIONAL FOCUS FOR WORK ON RESPONSE TO CHEMICAL ACCIDENTS
AND SURVEILLANCE OF HEALTH****24 Hour Chemical Incidents Telephone Hotline****0541 545654**

NB Please **do not** use the Hotline for **routine** enquiries to the Focus. All such enquiries should be directed to Mr Huw Bowen, whose contact details are provided at the bottom of the page.

A Callink Service has been established to ensure timely and effective answering of all calls made to the Hotline. However, should you experience difficulty in making contact with the Focus through the Hotline number, then please do not hesitate to communicate directly with the following Focus staff, in the order shown below (preferably by pager, in the first instance)

¹ Mr Huw Bowen

Tel. Work: 01222 506858

Fax. Work: 01222 506803

Pager 01426 286367

Mobile 0370 825790

² Professor Gary Coleman

Tel. Work: 01222 506852

Fax. Work: 01222 506803

Pager 01426 152182

Mobile 0370 828515

³ Professor Philip Routledge

Tel. Work: 01222 709901

Fax. Work: 01222 704357

Pager 01426 240162

⁴ Dr Huw Rees

Tel. Work: 01222 709901

Fax. Work: 01222 704357

Pager 01426 240305

Mobile 0378 154360

⁵ Professor Stephen Palmer

Tel. Work: 01222 521997

Fax. Work: 01222 521987

Pager 01426 615594

⁶ Scottish Poisons Information Bureau

Tel. 0131-536-2300

Fax. 0131-536-2304

Mr Huw Bowen

Head, National Focus

Faculty of Community Health Sciences

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

Western Avenue, CARDIFF CF5 2YB

Tel. 01222 506858; Fax. 01222 506803; E.Mail: hjbowen@uwic.ac.uk

The health board plan for response to chemical incidents should indicate:

CONTACT POINTS AND DETAILS (SCIEH) (during office hours)

Dr P Christie
Mr G Morris
Dr I Jones (Director)

0141 946 7120 (out of hours the duty officer)

If it is necessary to contact the Scottish Office Department of Health direct (during office hours):

Dr D Dixon - 0131-244-2779
Mr A Oliver - 0131-244-2504

Outside office hours, the Scottish Office Department of Health Duty Officer should be contacted Dr D Dixon - 01506 842952 Home
- 01893 964122 Radio Pager

NATIONAL POISONS INFORMATION SERVICE - ENQUIRY NUMBERS

Belfast	-	01232 248095 Out of Hours: diverted to the Royal Victoria Hospital
Birmingham	-	0121 507 5588/89
Cardiff	-	01222 709 901
Edinburgh	-	0131 536 2300
Leeds	-	0113 2430715
London	-	0171 635 9191
Newcastle	-	0191 232 1525 or out of hours and weekends: 0191 232 5131



THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Department of Health

file (26)
AAA
SCOTTISH

Public Health Policy Unit
St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG 2501

Telephone 0131-244
Fax 0131-244-2157

For action:

General Managers, Health Boards
Chief Executives, NHS Trusts
Directors of Public Health, Health Boards
Director SCIEH

Our Ref.: MEL(1997)52

For Information:

General Manager CSA
General Manager, State Hospitals Board for Scotland
Chief Executive, HEBS
Executive Director, SCPMDE

24 October 1997

Dear Colleague

**NATIONAL FOCUS FOR WORK ON RESPONSE TO CHEMICAL INCIDENTS
AND SURVEILLANCE OF HEALTH EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
CHEMICALS**

I refer to MEL(1997)52 signed by Dr Steel and dated 21 August 1997. I am writing to inform you of amendments to the contact phone numbers listed.

Firstly, the telephone and fax numbers for Mr Huw Bowen should now read 01222-506381 (telephone) and 01222-506387 (fax).

National Focus pager numbers listed at Annex 2 have also changed. Please obtain revised pager numbers through SCIEH (0141-946-7120) should you require them.

Please note that the National Focus Emergency Hotline number is unchanged.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hodgson
CHARLES HODGSON

COMMON SERVICES AGENCY	
RECEIVED	
27 OCT 1997	
FILE No	
REFERRED TO	ACTION TAKEN