

**EUR-OPA MAJOR
HAZARDS AGREEMENT**



COUNCIL OF EUROPE **CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE**

Strasbourg, 22 February 2005

AP/CAT (2005) 9 rev
Or.E.

OPEN PARTIAL AGREEMENT ON THE PREVENTION OF, PROTECTION AGAINST AND ORGANISATION OF RELIEF IN MAJOR NATURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DISASTERS

EARLY WARNING
The Key Requests to Early Warning System
(Community Awareness)

- 1. Community awareness**
- 2. Communications**
- 3. Emergency equipment, medicine, antidotes**
- 4. Recommendation**

submitted by

Mr Victor POYARKOV
Director of the European Centre of Technological Safety (TESEC),
KIEV, UKRAINE

1. Community Awareness

Public authorities should ensure, through the legal and procedural means, that the potentially affected public:

- is provided with general information on the nature, extent and potential effects on human health and/or the environment, including property, of possible disasters on the site,
- is provided with specific and timely information on the appropriate behaviour and safety measures they should adopt in the emergency situation and has access to other available information needed to understand the nature of the possible effects of a disaster (such as information on hazardous substances capable of causing serious damage) and to be able to contribute effectively, as appropriate, to decisions concerning the development of community emergency preparedness plans.

The activities of public authorities related to communication with the public should be co-ordinated to optimise the value of the communication and to build up trust and credibility.

Information concerning the potential adverse effects of a disaster should be shared openly and actively and should be comprehensive, correct, credible, clear and consistent.

(i) Care should be taken not to underestimate the ability of the public to deal with information concerning hazardous events, and not to be condescending in providing information to the public.

(ii) Public authorities should ensure that essential information is provided, and should not omit information out of a concern that it might generate fear or inquiries.

(iii) The public should be made aware of the information and documents available to them related to possible disaster, and where these can be examined.

(iv) Highly technical documents should include meaningful and comprehensive summaries in language, which is generally understandable.

(v) Public authorities should not infer a lack of interest on the part of the public if the public rarely consults such documents.

Public authorities should take steps to provide the public with information which will allow them to understand, and develop confidence in, the regulatory system's ability to ensure that hazardous installations are operating safely. Such communications should be two-way, providing an opportunity for public input to the authorities as well as providing information to the public from authorities. This will allow the public, public authorities and other interested parties to learn from each other.

Certain information concerning possible disaster, for instance that related to emergency response, should be provided actively, without request, to members of the public potentially affected in the event of a disaster. In defining the targeted audience for such information, natural community groupings or boundaries should be used to avoid disseminating different information among members of the same community.

The members of the public potentially affected by a possible disaster should be carefully delineated, and the information should be targeted so that all potentially affected people have adequate and appropriate information presented in an easily understandable manner.

The information should permit all relevant individuals to understand their responsibilities (for example, teachers require special information and training in view of their responsibilities in the event of an accident and to assure parents that their children will be safeguarded).

In order to avoid confusion and facilitate information exchange, the mechanisms for obtaining and delivering information should be as clear as possible and use, to the extent possible, known and existing channels.

Information concerning possible disaster which is provided to the potentially affected public should be provided in timely fashion, be reissued periodically, as appropriate, and updated as necessary.

The responsibility for communicating information concerning possible disaster should be assigned to persons who have the necessary knowledge and skills, are viewed as knowledgeable and credible, and enjoy respect in the community.

Individuals responsible for communication of information related to possible disaster should be specifically trained to understand how to develop information for target audiences and how to deliver information effectively, particularly in an emergency.

The effectiveness of communication with the public should be assessed to ensure that the information is understood and retained, in order that the appropriate actions are taken during an emergency. Consideration of the public's reaction to information concerning possible disaster and accidents should be part of the testing and feedback stage of the communication process.

Mechanisms should be established to facilitate consultation with the public concerning the type of information it would like to receive and the information, which should be made available regarding possible disaster.

(i) Public authorities should initiate discussions with interested parties on the acceptability/tolerability of risks so that the public becomes familiar with risk concepts and is better able to participate in the decision-making processes. Public authorities should consider the possibility of creating community groups for this purpose.

(ii) Industry of hazardous installation can help promote this education process by maintaining close relations with the local population, community leaders and groups, education facilities, etc.

(iii) Non-governmental organisations may play a role in increasing public awareness by providing information concerning hazards and the need for safe practices, procedures and equipment.

Communication of information by industry to the public on plant safety, safety industry measures and the characteristics of substances should not be unduly hampered by reference to "trade secrets". As a general rule, multinational enterprises should not claim trade secret protection in one country for types of information they release in another country.

An effective internal communication system within a hazardous installation is a prerequisite for industry to achieve effective communication with the public. In addition, employees from hazardous installations can play an important role in communications with the public since they have a working knowledge of the installation and a strong incentive to ensure its continuing safe operation in order to protect themselves and their families.

As the media are a primary channel of information to the general public, media representatives should be involved in the development and implementation of the communication process. Industry and public authorities should provide representatives of the media with background information, in order that the media can be more effective in providing information to the public.

2. Communications

Emergency warning alert systems should be available to warn the potentially affected public that a disaster has occurred or that there is an imminent threat of possible disaster.

(i) The system chosen can vary depending on local culture and conditions providing that it is effective and timely. Suitable warning systems could include, for example, sirens, automatic telephone messages, mobile public address systems or a combination of systems.

(ii) The potentially affected public should be notified of the systems which will be used in an emergency, and the systems should be tested in advance so that their significance is fully understood by the public and the public knows how to respond appropriately in an emergency.

(iii) In order to increase public understanding of warning systems, new approaches - such as public education through schools and greater use of audio-visual materials - should be explored.

Designated spokespeople for emergency situations should be carefully chosen in order that they have the necessary knowledge, skills, authority and credibility to effectively communicate with the public.

(i) They should be specifically selected and trained to understand how to develop information for target audiences and deliver information effectively.

(ii) Since effective communication with the public during an emergency requires the coordinated involvement of a number of relevant parties - including, for example, local response officials, corporate spokespeople, employee representatives, community representatives, public authorities, technical experts and the media - the duties of these parties should be established during the preparation of emergency plans.

The media should be involved during the development of emergency plans and should be given information concerning the emergency plans in order that they have the necessary background to be an effective and reliable source of information should an accident occur.

Public health authorities should establish their own health sector plans at national, regional and local level as part of the overall emergency preparedness plans.

(i) Each country should establish an information centre capable of providing relevant information in an emergency on the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of injured persons.

(ii) This information should be available on a 24-hour-a-day basis throughout the year.

Public health authorities, including experts from the information centre, should be involved in national and local emergency planning.

(i) They should take part in exercises with the other relevant authorities involved in emergency response, in order to test emergency plans and train emergency response medical staff.

(ii) They should be consulted when issuing statements to the media concerning health aspects of disaster consequences.

As part of emergency planning, it should be ensured that adequate medical facilities are available including transportation facilities, which may mean in an emergency the rapid transformation of facilities normally used for other purposes.

(i) The availability should also be ensured of up-to-date antidotes and other pharmaceutical substances, including oxygen, necessary for the treatment of persons injured by chemicals.

(ii) Where suitable antidotes exist for treatment of persons injured by chemicals produced or used by industry, the industry should be required to ensure their availability locally if this is a problem for the health authorities. Necessary relevant emergency medicines, kept updated, should be available at installations handling toxic chemicals.

(iii) Decontamination equipment for on-site and hospital use and, as appropriate, protective equipment for the medical emergency response personnel should also be available (in the case of chemical or radiological accident).

Public health and education authorities should ensure the basic training of all medical and paramedical professions, as appropriate, in the principles of medical toxicology and emergency medicine. Specialist courses should be provided for those involved in emergency response work.

Industry should be encouraged to provide to the appropriate information centres adequate data for emergency medical response and follow-up, including information on the composition and the toxicological and other relevant properties of chemical products which they produce, use, store, dispose of, or transport. Arrangements should be made to guarantee the confidentiality of data where appropriate.

The health authorities and the relevant sectors of industry should encourage research into new antidotes and decontamination procedures for toxic chemicals.

3. Emergency equipment, medicines and antidotes

The types of emergency equipment needed to meet specific types of emergencies should be determined, and this equipment (for example, specially designated emergency response vehicles) obtained. All emergency equipment should be in working order, highly reliable, effective, and available when an emergency occurs.

The best storage areas for emergency equipment should also be determined. The value of storing such equipment near the sites of possible emergencies should be assessed, with consideration given to ease of accessibility and protection from unauthorised use. Periodic checks need to be carried out on the equipment's adequate functioning.

As part of emergency preparedness planning, it should be ensured that adequate medical facilities are available, including transportation facilities. In an emergency, this may mean the rapid transformation of facilities normally used for other purposes.

Where suitable antidotes exist to chemicals produced by industry, industry should be required to ensure the availability locally of the antidotes if obtaining them is a problem for the health authorities. Essential emergency medicines, kept up-to-date, should be available at or near installations handling toxic chemicals or sites of possible disaster for use by authorized health professionals. Emergency medical facilities, medical centres or hospitals in proximity to such installations or sites of possible disaster should also stock appropriate emergency medicines, antidotes and equipment to deal with the consequences of a major chemical accident.

For a limited number of poisonings (for example, by cyanides, organophosphates) and under certain circumstances (long distances to treatment facilities, limited means of transport) it is desirable to be able to begin antidote treatment at the accident site. Vital supportive treatment should always be started as soon as possible.

4. Recommendation on strengthening of early warning system

- **General public awareness**

Developing and dissemination (together with national authority) of posters, booklets, information on web site regarding risk, attributed to site (tsunami, flood, storm, hurricane, earthquake, landslide, technological disasters, wild animals, etc.) for general public in region and specifically for foreign tourists.

- **National and local authority**

Developing and dissemination (together with national authority) of training materials, handbooks, booklets regarding risk, attributed to site (tsunami, flood, storm, hurricane, earthquake, landslide, technological disasters, wild animals, etc.), appropriate preparedness and emergency management procedures and recommendations, communication system. To organise and perform an appropriate training courses.

- **Legislation**

In the spirit of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental, which is generally intended strengthen citizens' environmental rights, to invite national authority more clear reflect in the national legislation request to local authority to inform general public and specifically temporal foreign habitants (like tourists) about environmental risk, attributed to certain areas.