

Chemical accidents can have serious and widespread effects on health. Epidemiology is an important tool for evaluating these effects and thus supplying information on which to base action to deal with a current accident and to help prepare for future ones.

Recognizing that epidemiologists can make a valuable contribution to each phase of a chemical incident – preparedness, response and follow-up – the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health convened a working group to set out some of the most effective approaches. This book is the result. It identifies the special part that epidemiology can play in a coordinated multidisciplinary response to a chemical incident, the tools to use in health risk assessment and roles in support activities such as training and the dissemination of information. The book supports and illustrates its arguments with lessons learned from the management of four major incidents in Europe: the fire at Schweizerhalle, the Seveso accident, the grounding of an oil tanker in Scotland and the toxic oil syndrome in Spain.

This book is directed specifically to the public health official or epidemiologist who may need to plan or undertake an epidemiological study of populations exposed to chemicals through major accidents or environmental contamination. Realizing the potential contribution of epidemiology to the management of chemical incidents is an important step in creating an effective multidisciplinary response.