

Development of a joint response emergency plan

The PHA may be involved in responding to a range of incidents that have the potential to impact on the wider health and well being of the public of Northern Ireland.

Regardless of the cause of the emergency, the role of the agency is mainly two-fold:

- Health protection staff are available 24/7 to provide immediate and on-going public health advice into an incident.
- In an unfolding incident, PHA staff will work with colleagues from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Business Services Organisation (BSO) to jointly lead the coordination of the HSC response when an incident or emergency involves more than one Trust, but does not require cross-department or cross-government coordination.

The PHA/HSCB/BSO joint response emergency plan sets out the main arrangements for this joint response, thereby ensuring that the response of the three regional HSC organisations is coordinated and effectively managed.

Incident and consultation response

Members of the EmpEnh team have responded to a number of incidents in the past 12 months. These have included carbon monoxide poisoning, an unused tyre fire with a toxic plume, a severe weather event with heavy snow, subzero temperatures and water supply shortages, and chlorine gas at a swimming pool.

Throughout each of these unfolding incidents, PHA staff worked with multi-agency partners to coordinate a community-wide response. Our partners included the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI); Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS); Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS); local councils; Health and Safety Executive (HSE); Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); Northern Ireland Water (NIW); Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

The team also leads the statutory response on behalf of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) applications in respect of new and existing facilities which could have an impact on the health of the community. It is also consulted in respect of planning applications which could have a potential adverse health impact.

Training

The PHA has responsibility (DHSSPS Policy Circular HSC (PHD) Communication 2/2010) to work within the resources available to facilitate training of, and emergency preparedness exercises for, relevant staff across the HSC system and the DHSSPS, including promotion of training initiatives.

As such, in 2011 the agency embarked on an initial training programme within the three regional organisations. Further joint training is planned with Trusts and DHSSPS in 2011-12.

Members of the EmpEnh team also contribute to the Health Protection module within the master's degree in public health, run by Queen's University Belfast.

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