

HSE PROCEDURES FOR THE PROVISION OF SCIENTIFIC ADVICE IN A CRISIS

Purpose of the Document

1. The Government Chief Scientific Adviser's 'Guidelines on the use of scientific and engineering advice in policy making' (the Guidelines) advise that Departments have in place procedures for obtaining scientific advice in a crisis. This living document sets out HSE's procedures.

Background

2. HSE notes that the Guidelines have no definition of a 'crisis' and uses the definition of an 'emergency' in the Civil Contingencies Act (CC Act) s1, which is:
 - (a) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom,
 - (b) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment of a place in the United Kingdom, or
 - (c) war, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.
3. As a body that can be called on to deal with major incidents in areas where HSE is responsible under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSW), HSE has arrangements in place to respond to these incidents. These are HSE's Major Incidents Response Plans and cover incidents on Offshore Installations and Serious Industrial Accidents. HSE also has arrangements to respond to a major civil contingencies event and to respond to a 'non-nuclear event' at a civil nuclear site. In both cases the procedures ensure that advice is provided to Gold and Silver command as appropriate. In the event of a nuclear event at a civil nuclear site the lead department is either Dti or the Scottish Executive. They are responsible for the appointment of the Government Technical Advisor (GTA). The Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations, or one of the Deputies, is responsible for ensuring that there is appropriate technical support to the GTA.
4. HSE (including its Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL)) is a large organisation with approximately 1100 scientists and engineers, including 350 at HSL. Taken together they have an extensive expertise and knowledge and of its application in the identification, assessment and management of risk, particularly in terms of dynamic risk assessment where the background is changing. They are fully in touch with, and aware of, scientific and technical developments in their fields and the implications for our work and, taken together, are able to provide technical support/risk assessment in any of the disciplines needed for HSE to fulfil its regulatory responsibilities. The work of HSE is also supported by a number of Advisory Committees (eg on Dangerous Substances, Dangerous Pathogens, the Offshore Industry and whose membership can be drawn from the relevant industries but also have independent members from academia etc).
5. The areas on which HSE leads in the provision of scientific advice in a crisis are Emergencies on Offshore Installations, Transport Accidents on Land (with DfT) and Serious Industrial Accidents - where the main focus relates to HSE's operations. However, HSE is able to provide scientific advice in a crisis, irrespective of:
 - How HSE becomes involved in the provision of scientific advice;
 - Whether HSE launches a response to the crisis;
 - Whether HSE is the Lead Government Department;
 - Whether HSE is the Lead Department in the provision of scientific advice.

HSE works with other departments and agencies to share knowledge and expertise and actively feeds into workstreams emanating from the Government's contingency work. Should a crisis occur where HSE considers that it has expertise to offer it would proactively contact the lead organisation.

HSE's Procedures for the Provision of Scientific Advice in a Crisis

7. Should HSE need to respond to an emergency (including a 'non-nuclear' event at a civil nuclear site) a response team would be established using a procedure identical to that used to recruit a response team under the Major Incident Response Plans. The Chief Scientist would ensure that this response team includes scientists and/or engineers from relevant HSE and HSL sections, supplemented by external support, as appropriate, from Call-off contracts and Registers of Professionals. The response team would provide advice to Gold and Silver command as appropriate. If the emergency was a 'nuclear' event at a civil nuclear site, then HSE will input fully into the arrangements established by Dti for such events. The Chief Scientist would ensure that secretariat support was adequate for the scientists involved in the team.
8. HSE would follow the principles in the Chief Scientific Adviser's Guidelines with respect to both the peer review of the scientific advice received and in ensuring that any evidence on which decisions are made are published. With respect to the latter, HSE's Chief Press Officer produces and maintains written detailed instructions. These ensure that (i) there is effective communication between the Press Office, the HSE staff responding to the incident and the HSE co-ordination team, (ii) the GNN is alerted that an incident has occurred and (iii) that a Press Officer attends the incident site if requested.

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