

Strengthening of Poison Control Centres



Poison Control Centres collect data necessary to determine the risk and danger of chemicals to human health and the environment. The evaluation of information on intoxications can be used by decision makers on national and international level for the determination of risks and dangers due to chemicals and the development of chemical laws, regulations and the implementation of conventions.

Background

Poison Control Centres offer direct advice to the public, medical professionals and institutions like the police, fire brigade or customs on current toxic problems. The information given can be general on chemicals, plant-protective agents, cosmetics, plants and animals, mushrooms, drugs and others, to assist the treatment of intoxicated people or prevent any poisoning.

Making use of information

Intoxications may happen at the workplace, at home, due to contaminated environment, through fault of others, own mistake or even intentional. In general chemicals are not like medicine tested on their effect of humans and the environment. Health consequences can only be estimated from toxicological research on animals. For a realistic assessment of the risk and hazardous effect of a chemical the systematic collection and the evaluation of available data on human intoxications from medical treatments in the hospitals is important.

These evaluations are not only of value for medical doctors, they will also be drawn on by such official control mechanisms as the border patrol, police and the chemical accidents units of fire departments. Furthermore, they provide baseline data used by decision makers on national and international level to settle on bans, regulations, amendment of laws and the assessment of hazardous substance risks and form a base for implementation of relevant global agreements like the Rotterdam Convention.

The Convention proposes to found an international responsibility for the import and export of chemicals between the parties. It furthermore requests the function of an international committee on the risk and hazard assessment of dangerous chemicals. Those people depend on globally comparable information to assess and determine the potential damage a chemical could cause.



Poison Centre Hospital Posadas in Argentina operates 24 hours and receives nearly 100 phone calls daily.

(Picture: Susanne Scholaen)



The majority of intoxications in developing countries is caused by pesticides, home made medicine and drugs.

(Picture: Susanne Scholaen)



Fields of action

Poison control centres can facilitate the exchange of experience. They can collect information, evaluate, analyse and communicate it on a national, regional and international level. Many countries do have more than one centre. Brazil for instance has 32, Mexico 25 and Argentina 21 poison control centres distributed within their countries. In most cases information is needed instantaneously. Nowadays electronic data and communication systems are available and help to have access to information very fast, if the information is processed in an international understandable and comparable way. Therefore the creation of national networks is a first and a regional or international network is a second and third step for a global harmonized data collection and evaluation to support global environmental policies.

Convention Project Chemical Safety has supported together with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) the establishment of a Latin American network of Poison Control Centres. A data base system has been created and tested in collaboration with eight leading Latin American countries. In a second step the data base has been presented to a wider group of country representatives and has been validated. In the next assessment period 12 countries will contribute (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay). The project has also started to promote the experiences from Latin America to other continents. In Africa Ghana has received support for their unique poison control centre in Accra.

Those activities have been very strongly supported by the German poison control centres in München, Göttingen, Mainz, Freiburg, Erfurt and Bonn.



Children are worldwide the most susceptible group for intoxications.

(Picture: Wolfgang Schimpf)



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