

INTRODUCTION: THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is the third conference in the series “Water Contamination Emergencies” and is the most ambitious. The first conference in 2003 in Kenilworth, Warwickshire¹, challenged delegates with the question, ‘Can We Cope?’ The conference focussed on the more traditional water quality incidents that have recently occurred and considered the handling of seven major case studies of contamination events. Papers were presented by invited experts and, together with posters, reviewed lessons learned and identified ways to better cope in future.

It was concluded that there was particular key information needed to respond appropriately to incidents, including:

- the need to be aware it has happened;
- knowledge of the extent of problem;
- accurate and timely identification and quantification of contaminant; and
- identification of the origin of contaminant.

Other key features include consideration of:

- remediation issues;
- communication with consumers and users;
- liaison with health professionals and local authorities; and
- communication with media.

The conference concluded that, in general, water companies and key agencies respond well and were well positioned to deal with typical emergencies but more awareness and pre-planning would improve the response.

The second conference in 2005 in Manchester² addressed the issue of “Enhancing Our Response”. It provided a forum for sharing new knowledge gained from two years experience following the first conference and considered the development of expertise and responses to contamination events, particularly in the areas of analysis and emergency planning. There was an international focus and particular consideration of possible

malicious acts of contamination. New strategies and technologies were presented and again there was emphasis on communications with and between all parties, with the need to address consumer perceptions. A prime requirement for robust and rapid screening of samples was confirmed and areas of good practice were identified. The conference also considered the potential challenges associated with preparedness and heightened security in the CBRN context.

Again there was evidence of progress in preparedness, both in the UK and globally, and a desire to see greater interaction between key players in an incident to develop improved procedures and provide learning opportunities. This gave an immediate focus for this third conference.

2 THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

This conference has as its theme ‘Collective Responsibility’. The organising committee believes that individuals should identify their own key responsibilities and take action to establish effective and efficient working relationships and knowledge-sharing networks with those with whom they will be required to work in an emergency – in other words, taking Collective Responsibility. A key aim of the conference is to provide a sharing forum for individuals in key organisations actively involved in any water contamination incident. Collective responsibility requires prior consideration of how to plan, respond, communicate and manage risk in an emergency and how to share, learn and develop after the event. We question whether individuals and teams have fully learned, shared best practice, established effective networks, collaborated, targeted research or exercise together. There appears to be no common set of values for evaluating risk and prioritising that risk; a constrained enthusiasm and desire to make a common approach work; and there seems to be little opportunity to modify systems. By encouraging international involvement, it is hoped that broader networks to promote these objectives can be established.

In order that all subject areas can be appropriately covered, three streams have been chosen for the delegates:

- Operations (systems, security and procedures);
- Data/Information (quality testing, analysis, on line monitoring, modelling and data interpretation); and
- Communication (emergency planning, public communication and inter agency working).

The two days of the conference are further divided into sessions which cover planning and preparedness, security and initial responses, incident management and the aftermath. The conference will end with three plenary sessions on day two.

This conference will deal with the full range of potential contaminations scenarios - chemical, biological and radiological. It will be of strategic, tactical and operational interest to organisations involved in civil contingency response, emergency planners, medical and health professionals, local authorities, service and support providers, detection equipment suppliers, disaster recovery specialists, remediation companies, research organisations and water companies and regulators. It will also provide a significant networking opportunity which all delegates are encouraged to utilise to the full.

References

1 Water Contamination Emergencies – Can we Cope? Edited by J. Gray and K.C.Thompson, RSC Publications, ISBN 0-85404-628-3, 2004.

2 Water Contamination Emergencies – Enhancing our Response, Edited by K.C.Thompson and J. Gray and RSC Publications, ISBN 978-0-85404-658-4, 2006.