

CHEMTREC®: The Next Generation



File photos

The American Chemistry Council's (ACC's) Chemical Transportation Emergency Center (CHEMTREC®) offers information to emergency responders dealing with hazardous material (hazmat) incidents. Operating around the clock, this communications center represents the chemical industry's responsibility to those who handle, manufacture and use its products. As such, it has grown to meet the changing needs of shippers and manufacturers around the world.

"The chemical industry has a long tradition of safety and this ethic of stewardship has set the stage for a program that touches the lives of millions of Americans every year," says Randy Speight, Senior Managing Director. "We continue to be dedicated to operating in the public's interest and being the primary tool for emergency responders needing information on the products of chemistry."

Then and now

The seeds of CHEMTREC were sown in 1918, when the Manufacturing Chemists Association (MCA)—which would eventually become ACC—formed a committee to improve containers for shipping liquid chemicals. A series of railway accidents involving corrosive

chemical shipments for the WWI effort had revealed the need for an industry-wide effort.

CHEMTREC grew directly from cooperation between MCA and the U.S. Department of Transportation, which met in 1969 to determine the best approach for a reporting and response system. MCA's board of directors authorized the establishment of CHEMTREC in 1970 and the center was in full operation by 1971.

Today, CHEMTREC plays a vital role in ensuring responders have immediate access to technical information in the event of an unfortunate incident. From its headquarters in Arlington, Va., the center manages more than five million Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs). By comparison, in 1971 it used only 1,600.

After assisting the New York City Police Hazardous Materials Team during the tragedies of Sept. 11, 2001, CHEMTREC expanded its role to include security. It was chosen to operate the Chemical Sector Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC), which was created in April 2002 through an agreement between ACC and the FBI's National Infrastructure Protection Center.

More recently, CHEMTREC helped first responders during hurricanes in the gulf region.

International relationships

CHEMTREC handles more than 100,000 calls each year. It has extended its reach by building relationships with foreign emergency centers and international chemical industry associations to help gather and share information for incidents involving foreign shipments.

CHEMTREC has strong relationships and working procedures with centers in Canada, Mexico and the U.K. It is also working with international associations to encourage other countries to establish similar centers where none exist. In recent years, for example, CHEMTREC sent representatives to Europe and Asia and hosted delegations from South America and Asia.

Such efforts continue today. In late February, the center hosted a special event that was the first of its kind—the CHEMTREC International Emergency Response Summit, conceived to explore the challenges of responding to a chemical incident in the global arena, as well as identifying ways to address those challenges.

The summit addressed three main regions:

- Asia, with a particular focus on China, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia.
- Central and South America, with a particular focus on Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela.
- Central and Eastern Europe.

The information collected from and issues raised by summit participants were used at the end of the event to develop 'next steps' recommendations. These recommendations may involve content and location of future summits, as the inaugural event is hoped to lead to others. ●