



**World Health  
Organization**

**INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON CHEMICAL SAFETY -  
INTOX Project**

**POISONS CENTRE TRAINING MANUAL**

*Training materials for poisons information staff*

**TRAINER'S VERSION**

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## Foreword

The contents of this manual have been developed by an international working group of experienced poisons centre staff. The aim of the manual is to provide source material for those needing to train poisons information staff, either when setting up a new poisons centre or when establishing a training programme in an existing centre. The materials are written from a general perspective and may need to be adapted to local circumstances.

This volume is written for the trainer. It contains the same material as that for the trainee, with some additional suggestions about points to be emphasized and about training methods. Suggested answers to the trainee's test questions are also provided.

Each of the chapters stands alone, however they have been compiled into a single volume for convenience.

A Word version of the chapters in the manual can be obtained by contacting [ipcsintox@who.int](mailto:ipcsintox@who.int).

## Acknowledgments

The following people have assisted in the development of this training manual and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged:

Professor Rahmat Awang, National Poison Centre, Penang, Malaysia; Dr Kinda Bakjaji, Syrian Poisons Information Centre, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic; Dr Edith Clarke, Poisons Centre, Accra, Ghana; Mr Mark Colbridge, Guy's & St Thomas' Poisons Unit, London, UK; Dr Wim Daelman, Belgian Poisons Centre, Brussels, Belgium; Ms Alison Dines, Guy's & St Thomas' Poisons Unit, London, UK; Mr Diego Gotelli, Centro de Información Química para Emergencias, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Dr Maren Hermanns-Clausen, Poisons Information Centre, Freiburg, Germany; Dr Tomas Jovaisa, Poisons Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania; Dr Jules de Kom, Paramaribo, Suriname; Dr Michael Kunde, Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Berlin, Germany; Dr Amalia Laborde, Centro de Información y Asesoramiento Toxicológico, Montevideo, Uruguay; Dr Irma Makalinao, National Poison Control & Information Service, Manila, Philippines; Dr Wael Malas, Syrian Poisons Information Centre, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic; Ms Robin McKeown (retired), Canberra, Australia; Dr Martine Mostin, Belgian Poisons Centre, Brussels, Belgium; Dr Lynn Panganiban, National Poison Control & Information Service, Manila, Philippines; Dr Daniela Pelclová, Poisons Information Centre, Prague, Czech Republic; Dr Hans Persson, Swedish Poisons Information Centre, Stockholm, Sweden; Dr Lexley Pinto Pereira, University of the West Indies, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago; Dr Uwe Stedtler, Poisons Information Centre, Freiburg, Germany; Dr Wayne Temple, National Poisons Centre, Dunedin, New Zealand; and Dr Rebecca Tominack, Missouri Regional Poison Center, St Louis, USA.

Secretariat: Joanna Tempowski, International Programme on Chemical Safety, Department of Public Health and Environment, WHO, Geneva.



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## Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the principles of training new poisons information staff (section A), and the principles of continuing education (section B). It is complemented by Chapter 1.2 *Training Poisons Information Staff - Methods*.

### A. Training new staff

#### Introduction

This section gives an outline of the subjects that should be covered in a training programme for new poisons information staff. A detailed programme must be developed by each centre according to local circumstances. In particular the training needs will be affected by the educational background of poisons information staff. This varies from centre to centre, for example, the staff may be educated to university degree level in e.g. biochemistry, medicine, pharmacology, pharmacy, toxicology or they may be experienced, qualified nurses.

#### 1. General aspects of training

The main components in a poisons information system are the staff and the data bank. Neither by itself will ensure an optimal poisons information service; that is dependent on the smooth interaction between the two.

The competence of the staff, crucial for the quality of the information service provided, is dependent on several factors: basic education, personal qualities and specific training provided 'on the job'.

In this document some views are given on important issues in the training of poisons information staff. Inevitably the recommendations are of a general nature and may therefore seem self-evident to those who have worked in well-established centres for many years.

The impact of a thorough training programme cannot be overemphasized, and the amount of time required for training should not be underestimated. This may sound like a truism, however, experience shows the following. Too short a training period, e.g. because of difficult circumstances or overestimation of the knowledge and skills of a new staff member, can prove devastating and unfair to the trainee. All new staff members, irrespective of background and personal qualities, need a solid and undisturbed training period, ensuring good basic knowledge and a sound self-confidence. The duration of the initial training period may vary, but it should ideally be around three months. It is, however, important to remember that there is also need for continuous training of staff employed in a poisons centre (see below, Section B).

## **2. Areas to be covered in training**

1. Main tasks and responsibilities of the centre, user groups
2. Organization and policies
3. Telephone service
4. Documentation of enquiries to the centre
5. Information sources
6. Subject knowledge - general
7. Subject knowledge – specific
8. Up-dating the databank

### **2.1 Main tasks and responsibilities of the centre, user groups**

An explanation should be given of the purpose of the centre and its scope of activities; these are sometimes regulated by governmental instructions. It is important to clarify the legal aspects, what the centre is expected to achieve and, just as important, what is outside its mandate.

It is essential to clarify the authorized user groups, e.g. the general public, health care personnel, government authorities, the media, and to discuss their different requirements. It is crucial that poisons centre staff should not exceed their area of competence, and new staff members should be encouraged to consult with senior

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