



Evaluation of employee health clinics at two chemical weapons disposal sites

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is required by Congress to oversee Department of Defense lethal chemical warfare agent management and destruction activities to protect public health. Oversight activities include handling, transporting, monitoring, and destroying chemical munitions containing the nerve agents GA (tabun), GB (sarin), VX, and the blister agent HD (sulfur mustard); and medical oversight of workers.

In June and July 2003, CDC conducted site visits to the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility in Tooele, Utah and the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility in Hermiston, Oregon, respectively. CDC evaluated the medical clinics and occupational health programs in place to treat potential worker exposures to chemical warfare agents at these stockpiles. Approximately 700 employees at each stockpile are at risk of potential agent exposure, and approximately 300 employees routinely enter toxic environments immediately dangerous to life and health.

Findings were based on visits to the clinic facilities, discussions with staff, review of pertinent documents and materials, and observation of a training exercise. Recommendations were made regarding patient decontamination procedures, staff training, clinic accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), medical surveillance/screening for nerve agent exposure, red blood cell (RBC) cholinesterase monitoring, hazard assessment, development of a heat stress prevention program based on current American Council of Governmental Industrial Hygienists guidelines, use of a sensor system to measure core body temperature, development of a program to evaluate functional capacity of workers using special personal protective equipment in toxic environments, and surveillance of heat-induced health events.

Learning Objectives: At the conclusion of the session, the participant (learner) in this session will be able to

- Discuss the chemical accident/incident response capability needed to treat potential worker exposures to chemical agents.
- Describe the biological monitoring procedures used to confirm chemical agent exposures.
- List the elements needed to develop a heat stress prevention program.

Keywords: Occupational Health, Occupational Safety

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

I do not have any significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

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