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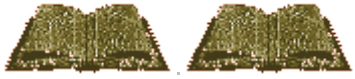 (N.B. Please increase your screen resolution to 1600 x 1200 dpi or more, for best viewing)

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SETTING UP YOUR OWN POISON INFORMATION CENTER

Guidelines for poison control, 1st Edition *by* World Health Organization, Geneva

World Health Organization, Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland; xii + 112 pages [E, F*, S*]: ISBN 92 4 154487 2. Publication Date 1997: Price: Sw.fr. 35.-/US $31.50; in developing countries: Sw.fr. 24.50, Order no. 1150439
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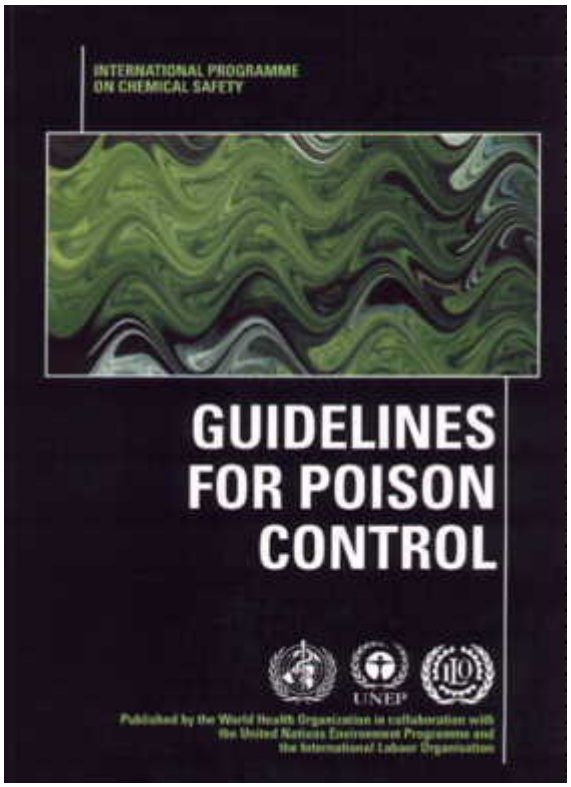

We are surrounded by millions of chemicals, and it is estimated that about one to two thousand new chemicals appear on the market every year. The result is that everyone of us is literally living with a Damocles' sword over his head. Most of these chemicals, be they pesticides, cosmetics, or food preservatives, pose grave risks to our health if inhaled, ingested or otherwise administered in the human system in excess. We have had several industrial disasters which are grim reminders of this fact. On the night of December 2, 1984, we - right here in India - had one of the worst chemical disasters in the world, the infamous Bhopal Gas Tragedy, which claimed an estimated 2500 lives. This is still ranked by Guinness Book of World Records as the Worst Chemical Disaster of the world till date. Had there been an organized and well equipped Poison Information Center in Bhopal in those times, undoubtedly, there would have been far lesser deaths.

So, what is a Poison Information Center, what is a Poison Control Programme and how can nations set it up? What are modalities involved? What technical expertise is needed? How much funds would go into that? These are the questions, which this little book addresses. And it does it very effectively. To the extent that I would imagine anyone intending to start a poison control center in his region must possess a copy of this book.

It all started in 1980, when *The International Programme on Chemical Safety* (IPCS) was established in 1980. It started as a collaborative programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO), The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Its aim was to provide assessments of the risks to human health and the environment posed by chemicals, so that all countries might be able to develop their own Poison Control Programmes.

View this book on Amazon

There are two more bodies which have almost identical programmes. One is the European Commission (EC), and the other, the World Federation of Associations of Clinical Toxicology Centers and Poison Control Centers (sometimes referred to simply as the World Federation). It was quite

natural for IPCS to work out its strategies in close collaboration with these two world bodies, and this is how it ultimately turned out to be.

A joint meeting of these three bodies took place for the first time from 6 to 9 October 1985, at the WHO headquarters, Geneva. At this meeting, it was recommended that guidelines be prepared on poison control and particularly on the role of Poison Information Centers. It was also decided to evaluate the role of antidotes in various poisonings, to develop poison prevention programmes, and to encourage specialized training in poison control. To my mind, it is not surprising that this meeting took place less than a year after the Great Bhopal Tragedy. In any case, this meeting was instrumental in sensitizing every nation in developing poison control programmes of their own.

After this meeting, on 24-25 February, 1986, a consultation of experts from poison information centers, from both developed and developing nations, was held in London. The ideas was to get advise on the structure and content of the proposed guidelines on poison control. It was agreed that the guidelines would be in two parts. The first would be concerned with national policy. This was expected to differ with different nations, depending on each one's own local needs and capabilities. The second was concerned with the technical aspects of establishing and running the various elements of a poison control programme. A drafting group was established and charged with the preparation of the guidelines. This group met twice - from 25 to 26 November 1986 in Brussels, Belgium, and from 16 to 20 February 1987 in London, England - and concentrated on the drafting on the policy overview. This book deals with these guidelines.

The book is divided in two parts. Part I is written primarily for the administrator and decision maker. Comprising of just one chapter - the first - it provides a policy overview of the problems of poisoning and the types of programmes and facilities that will be effective in preventing and dealing with them. Part II, comprises of rest of the book (Chapters 2-9). It provides technical guidance for those with direct responsibility for the establishment and operation of specific poison control facilities.

This book should be immensely useful for all who wish to start a poison control center in their own region, and is heartily recommended to all of them.

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or via
or via the website www.who.int/dsa
or via mail at this address: WHO, Marketing and Dissemination, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

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