

Toxicological Information- und Data Network - A European Challenge?

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Product Data Collection Approaches in Europe – United Kingdom

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The collection of data about products is an important issue for poisons information centres (PICs). The correct identification of the composition of a product enables PIC staff to assess risk and advise on management of exposure. Much of the data that is needed to assist in the management of acute cases of gross poisoning can be found in readily available sources: national formularies for pharmaceutical agents, regulatory listings for agrochemicals or information provided by the manufacturers on product packaging and internet websites. PICs may also have access to specific information from particular industrial sectors (e.g. soap and detergent manufacturers), sent voluntarily in the UK, and included in PIC databases.

In the UK the responsibility for collection of data and its provision to health professions is divided between PICs, Government and executive agencies of government. The collection and dissemination of data in the UK is incomplete and fragmented and there is no overall strategic direction. The most recent regulations in the UK to address dangerous preparations are the Chemical (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations (2002) (CHIP3) and this no longer mentions the 'Poisons Advisory Service'

UK PICs provide product data to health professionals via the telephone service or the Internet-based national database, TOXBASE'. It is not the role of UK PICs to provide data of any sort directly to the public.

The amount and quality of the data provided by manufacturers is variable and often incomplete from a PIC perspective. The imperatives for manufacturers to supply data are partly moral and partly legislative. There is generally good will and a willingness to help; yet this is tempered by cost and, sometimes, conflicting legal requirements. PICs have not, either in the UK or at EU level, been able to effectively influence the framing of legislation.

The impact of the provision of (non-pharmaceutical) product data to poisons centres on patient care is unknown. Most enquiries to UK PICs involve pharmaceuticals (~70%) and information about active ingredients and packaging is available and complete. Most, but by no means all, household products are of low acute toxicity. It is likely therefore that poor access to data has a small effect on the management of acute poisonings. However the ability to retrospectively survey cases of exposure to specific compounds to detect health impact is limited by the lack of accurate and comprehensive product data which in turn results in weaker human case data for risk assessment. Concerns about low level, long-term exposures and the related

effect on the sustainable use of chemicals should be a driver to improve the collection and dissemination of data on products, preferably electronically. This may subsequently improve human case data.