



# ASHT!

## Alerting System for Chemical Health Threats

### ASHTII at the EAPCCT Congress, Dubrovnik 2011\*

During the forthcoming International Congress of the European Association of Poisons Centres and Clinical Toxicologists (Dubrovnik 24 -27 May 2011), there will be a session in the main congress that is themed 'the public health role of poisons centres'. Within this session there will be a subtopic on the Alerting System for Chemical Health Threats Project.

The aims of this session are to:

- update delegates on the role of RAS-CHEM in detecting chemical health threats
- provide information on the clinical effect profiles incorporated in the system
- discuss MedDRA as a standardised clinical effect reference terminology system to describe symptoms of poisoning.

Following this session there will be a satellite symposium on ASHT activities and the implementation of RAS-CHEM.

The aims of this symposium are to:

- update invited EU National Public Health Officials and EU Poisons Centres on the overall function and purpose of RAS-CHEM, including an overview of the reporting process
- demonstrate how the system can be used to report suspected chemical incidents (including incidents of unknown cause) in a harmonised manner
- discuss how a European case database could be developed using lessons learnt from past experiences.

If you would like further information about the project or would like to become a collaborating partner please contact [asht@HPA.org.uk](mailto:asht@HPA.org.uk) or visit [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

*\*The XXXI International Congress of the European Association of Poisons Centres and Clinical Toxicologists, Valamar Lacroma Resort, Conference and Spa, Dubrovnik, Croatia. 24 -27 May 2011. Further details of the Congress are available on the EAPCCT website at [www.eapcct.org](http://www.eapcct.org).*



# Newsletter

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## The aim of the Alerting System for Chemical Health Threats - Phase II (ASHTII) project is to improve the speed and effectiveness of public health response to toxic exposures following deliberate or accidental chemical incidents.

Currently, no standardised format or protocol for sharing information or issuing alerts about chemical incidents throughout EU Member States exists. Therefore, the European Union Public Health Programme funded the Alerting System and Health Surveillance System project (ASHTI), which demonstrated poison centres are a feasible resource to detect sentinel events and culminated in outlining the concepts required to establish a Rapid Alert System for CHEMical health threats (RAS-CHEM). The ASHTI project was successful in envisaging an improved communication structure required for a successful rapid alerting system for chemical health threats. The second phase of the ASHTII project will improve upon the current data transfer systems and information sharing and will develop mechanisms (and strategies) for analysing and reporting information between health professionals, from poisons centres to national public health officials.



*ASHTII working group at the RAS-CHEM workshop in Lille, France, December 2010*

## Project Progress

The project has now passed the midway mark and significant updates include:

- Wide-scale testing of RAS-CHEM has been conducted, and was led by the EU Commission and ASHTII working group. Countries that participated in the testing and fed back into the iterative design of the systems included: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA.
- The dual platform reporting systems for risk management (RAS-CHEM) and risk assessment (EUPC Forum) of chemical incidents have been accepted by the Health Security Committee (HSC). Standard operating procedures (SOP) are being developed by the EU Commission for use of both systems.
- RAS-CHEM is expected to be operational from spring 2011 and implemented from autumn 2011. RAS-CHEM will be housed in the Health Emergency Operations Facility (HEOF), alongside other Rapid Alert Systems such as the Early Warning and Response System for communicable diseases (EWRS) and the Rapid Alerting System for CBRN health threats (RAS-BICHAT).
- The ASHTII group has recommended the inclusion of the standardised clinical effect reference terminology MedDRA to be incorporated into the IT platforms to enable the systems to be inter-operable with existing classification systems in European Poisons Centres and also facilitate data aggregation and mining.
- The ASHTII working group has successfully proposed new poisonings terms which have been included in the latest iteration of MedDRA (version 13.1 released in September 2010).
- There will be three EU chemical exercises in 2011 that will further test the systems.
- There will be an ASHTII session (and satellite meeting) at the 2011 EAPCCT congress in Dubrovnik, where EU Member State Public Health Officials will be invited to discuss the implementation and use of the reporting systems.