

Briefing – the role of Public Health Wales in an Environmental Incident

Public Health Wales is one of several agencies with a key role to play in responding to an environmental incident or emergency. The emergency services, NHS organisations and local authorities are all core responders with legal responsibilities (sometimes called Category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act).

In an environmental incident, experts from Public Health Wales work with other agencies to assess and help manage the risks to the public of the incident. When the risks have been assessed, we advise on what the public can do to prevent or minimise any harm to health.

In most cases, especially early in an incident when only limited information is available, we use our knowledge of other similar incidents, along with research evidence, to give advice on the best ways to protect health. We may also contact other agencies, such as Public Health England, to talk to their specialists and agree the best advice to give.

Sometimes, we arrange for other agencies to carry out environmental monitoring to help with our risk assessment. Public Health Wales does not have any environmental monitoring responsibilities, does not have monitoring equipment, nor does it have staff who are able to operate such equipment. What we can do is review any data collected by other agencies, interpret what the results mean for public health.