



Industrial Accidents

Certain industrial activities involving dangerous substances have the potential to cause accidents. Some of these accidents may cause serious injuries to people or damage to the environment both nearby, and further away from the site of the accident.



HISTORY

Buncefield

Recent experience of this type of incident in the UK was at Hemel Hempstead with the Buncefield Oil Depot explosion in 2004. The explosion measured 2.4 on the Richter scale, and caused the largest fire in Europe since the Second World War. 2,000 people were evacuated from their homes, and 370 businesses were affected, employing 16,500 people. Sixty members of the public required medical aid and the accident caused major disruption to roads, fuel supplies, local businesses and the supply chain.

COMAH

The Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (COMAH) (1999) and their amendments (2005) are the enforcing regulations within the United Kingdom.

They aim to prevent major accidents involving dangerous substances and to limit the consequences to people and the environment of any incidents that do occur. They are determined by the Health and Safety Executive and are applicable to any organisation or site storing or handling large quantities of industrial chemicals of a hazardous nature. Types of establishments include chemical warehousing, chemical production facilities and some distributors.

IN SUSSEX

Although Sussex is not considered more at risk than any other part of the country, there are industrial sites, fuel and gas pipelines running through the area and storage depots that all have the potential to cause a major fire or explosion.

The potential for a large impact does not always come from a large industrial site. If a fire involves acetylene cylinders (as found in many garages, workshops etc), fire service procedures require the imposition of a hazard zone for up to 24 hours of 200m. Anyone living within this zone will be evacuated until it is safe to return – it is important to be prepared so you know what you would do if this affected your home or business.

PUBLIC INFORMATION ZONES (PIZ)

Part of the COMAH Regulations puts a duty on the “Competent Authority” to determine an area around a COMAH establishment in which information must be made available. This area is known as the Public Information Zone (PIZ).

People within the PIZ must receive information about how they may be affected by a major accident at that establishment, this includes information about the potential major hazards and the safety measures that are in place as well as how they will be warned and kept informed in the event of a major accident and the actions that they should take.

Most other industrial sites have their own on site emergency plans.

RISK IMPACTS

The predicted impacts could include:

- Endangerment of life
- Damage to property and the local area
- Pollution of the local environment and water courses.

CONSEQUENCES

- The consequences could include:
- Impact to UK oil and gas supplies
- Economic impacts through damage to local businesses
- Long-term restoration and recovery of the local area
- Contamination of crops and agricultural land.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Be aware if you live near a hazardous site. If you hear warning of an incident, go indoors, close all your doors and windows and tune into BBC Local Radio for advice.
- This advice also applies in the event of a significant fire-related smoke plume from any industrial site.

WHAT ARE WE DOING IN SUSSEX?

- Work directly with site operators who manage particularly hazardous sites.
- Identification of ways and means of communicating with the public.
- Support for local communities to develop their own emergency plans.

