

CAPACITY FACT SHEET

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)



WHAT IS OPCW?

The OPCW is an inter-governmental organisation implementing the *Chemical Weapons Convention*. Its mandate covers verification and inspection activities in the chemical industry world-wide. The OPCW, with 188 Member States, works with non-proliferation, verification, and destruction of chemical weapons and inspections of chemical industry in Member States. At the same time, the OPCW supports peaceful use of chemistry, international cooperation, and provides assistance and protective measures in case of incidents involving chemical weapons or toxic chemicals.

The OPCW has established a rapid deployment team - Assistance Coordination and Assessment Team (ACAT) - which can bring expertise on scheduled and non-scheduled chemicals that fall under the annexes of the *Chemical Weapons Convention*. It is not environmental expertise, but deals with the effects of chemicals on the environment, detection, decontamination, sampling and analysis, protection of environment and civilian population, coordination and emergency management in case of delivery of assistance.

WHEN IS OPCW MOBILIZED?

OPCW will mobilize upon an official request for assistance in the following cases:

- When there is evidence of chemical weapons use and/or victims, the Director-General of the OPCW will dispatch emergency assistance immediately. In those cases where the country is not a signatory to the Convention, a country can request assistance through the UN Secretary-General.
- When there is a threat of chemical weapons use or riot control agents as a method of warfare, each State party has the right to ask for assistance. In cases which are not mentioned in the Convention (terrorist attacks, accidents/security incidents in chemical industry, etc.), a country can send a request for assistance to the Director-General of OPCW, but a decision will be made by the Executive Council members.

WHAT DOES OPCW DO IN THE FIELD?

Field activities will include rapid assessment of the situation; receipt of assets offered to the OPCW by Member States; coordination of activities if requested by national authorities; provision of expert advice upon request and cooperation with other actors on site. An OPCW team will join the international community on site and work in support of national authorities

All activities will be guided by a mission-specific mandate and be related to either chemical weapons or toxic chemicals. An OPCW team will not deal with biological, nuclear or radiological issues, but may provide expert advice if the competencies exist within the team on site.

WHAT RESOURCES DOES OPCW HAVE?

OPCW will deploy a 4 – 15 member team dependent on the situation. The team is not fully self-sufficient and some subsistence and operational support will be required. However, in addition to personal protective equipment for activities in potentially contaminated areas, an OPCW team will carry:

- Software, pre-installed on field computers, for downwind hazard prediction and modelling of potentially contaminated areas which will be off-limits to humanitarian and other organisations due to potential hazard and toxicity.
- Chemicals response software that provides guidance on immediate response to chemical threats, medical assistance, health and safety instructions, off-limit areas, etc.
- Other equipment dependent on the nature of a request, e.g., personal protective equipment for up to 1000 persons.



OPCW at work (source: OPCW)