



CHEMLINE - UK

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Welcome to another (belated!) Chemline Newsletter. As you'll see, it has been a particularly busy year for both Chemline and the Respirex Testing Laboratory. But before reading on please take a few minutes to copy this newsletter and distribute it amongst your Hazmat and BA maintenance colleagues; there is some important information here and it is crucial that everyone on your team is aware of it.

Procedural Problems

At the risk of sounding a bit like a stuck record, we're still having quite a lot of problems with the Chemline procedure. I know that I've mentioned this in previous newsletters, and I've sent everyone a procedural checklist (which is also available online), but some people still seem to be having trouble dealing with the post-incident phase of a Hazmat job. This has a knock-on effect for personnel who have to handle suits after an incident and even for me in the lab if I need to examine a suit. With ever-tightening safety legislation we really cannot afford these lapses in procedure. If you're in any doubt, I'm more than happy to go through your Brigade's in-house procedures with you - it's far easier to do it that way than to try to pick-up all the pieces when things go wrong!

Changes at the Respirex Testing Laboratory

There have been a couple of great changes at the Respirex Testing Laboratory. Firstly the lab itself and the Chemline Office have been relocated to another building on the Kingsfield Business Centre site. The contact details remain the same, but as I write, the finishing touches are being made to a first-rate state-of-the-art chemical permeation testing laboratory. There's a lot more space in the new lab for us to cope with the increased demand for permeation testing. The room is also fitted with a hi-tech air-conditioning system that can automatically maintain the temperature of tests at the hottest and coldest times of the year despite the fact that vast quantities of air are constantly drawn out of the lab through the fume-cupboards. Once the new lab is properly up and running we also plan to increase the scope of our UKAS accreditation to include flex-cracking resistance, tensile strength testing and tear-resistance of coated

fabrics. Although this doesn't directly impinge on the Chemline service it can only increase the knowledge-base from which Brigades are advised.

The second piece of news is that Jenelle Bleau has joined the team and has taken over responsibility for a lot of the day-to-day testing. Jenelle is a graduate chemist with a second degree in analytical chemistry. Kath Hoskins is still enjoying (is that the right word?) working in the lab but now only comes in 3 days a week. As Kath cuts back further on the hours she works the plan is for Jenelle to take over more of the management of the testing laboratory. Both Kath and Jenelle also give some cover for Chemline when I'm away or on holiday.

Telecoms

There seems to be some general confusion about how to contact Chemline and which numbers to use when. The answer is actually very simple, but it might be an idea to take a moment or two to correct the list of numbers next to your phone and make sure that Control have the same information.

The Chemline telephone number is 01737 771117. This is a combined fax, answering machine and telephone number. Any other 01737 numbers you have are likely to be for Respirex or Surrey Fire and Rescue, not Chemline. There are often times when I cannot get to the phone to answer your call. However, if your call isn't answered after 10 rings the machine will ask you to leave a message instead. I know that nobody likes talking to a machine, but please do leave a brief message if only to say who you are, what you're calling about and how and when I can call you back. This really is the quickest way to get a response - if necessary I can even access messages by dialling into the machine remotely, and I have often phoned people back in between meetings overseas.

The above also applies to calls at weekends. I realise that many of you work on Saturday and Sunday, but I'm only usually around from 9 to 6, Monday to Friday. But if you leave a message I can call you when I'm next in the office.

There is also a mobile telephone number for Chemline,

but this should only be used under very specific limited circumstances and not as an alternative to leaving a message on the landline:

- The mobile number should **only** be used for genuine emergencies involving **chemical protective clothing**
- It should **only** be tried only after you have first tried the land-line and left a message.
- The mobile number should strictly only be used between 9am and 5pm 7 days a week, but if you have a genuine emergency outside these times then Chemline may still be able to help

Emergencies involving chemical protective clothing are fortunately few and far between, and the only example I can think of in recent times is the case of a small brigade having used their entire stock of suits at a major incident and then needing to know whether they can safely re-use suits at the scene. However, even this example shouldn't arise again now that the New Dimensions suits are available for use. Although it shouldn't be needed very often, I actually take the "emergency" aspect of Chemline very seriously, and provided I am in an area with reasonable mobile-phone coverage I will do everything within my power to answer your call or call you back immediately. This often means that I have to take calls under "non-ideal" circumstances and as you might imagine, I don't welcome non-urgent calls at such times! If it's genuinely urgent please call, but before you dial 07711 070009, please ask yourself whether this is a real emergency, and if not, please, please leave a message on the landline instead.

Standards Update

Over the past year work has continued on British, European and International standards for chemical protective clothing. In the ISO arena we have seen the development of ISO 16602 "Protective clothing for protection against chemicals - Classification, labelling and performance requirements". This is a wide-ranging draft standard that encompasses all levels of chemical protection from gas-tight suits right down to clothing to protect against light spray contamination. However, this standard will not be adopted in Europe since it conflicts with several existing European Standards.

Much of the CEN standardization work in this area has been the revision of the spray and jet-tests for liquid-tight chemical protective clothing. Under CEN protocol all standards are reviewed every 5 years and revised if necessary. The CEN working group has also produced a technical report on the selection, use, care and maintenance (SUCAM) of chemical protective clothing.

Work is also ongoing on a British Standard that sets out the requirements for chemical protective clothing for first-responders to CBRN incidents. The draft standard has been issued for public comment and the committee at BSI is currently reviewing the comments and, where necessary, amending the text.

Planning for promotion

We all hope for promotion and look forward to better remuneration and more job satisfaction. But when the happy time comes, please spare a thought for whoever takes-over your current role. You may have been given the keys to the office and been told that everything you need to know is somewhere in the filing cabinet, but that probably didn't give you much of a head's start when you started this job. You probably had to find out a lot for yourself and I know that many new Hazmat Team Leaders and BA Officers only learn about Chemline when things go wrong - that's often the only time I get to know that their predecessor has moved on. Firstly, if you find yourself in this position please do get in touch and we can arrange a time for you and few members of your team to visit the lab, discuss the Chemline service and how to make it work best within your Brigade. But secondly, and equally importantly, now is an ideal time to start a "help file" for your successor. It needn't run into hundreds of pages, but it should include key contacts, a brief description of various services that the brigade subscribes to, and where further information can be found, whether that's in the office filing cabinet or online. If you keep adding to the file as you go along it will be an invaluable resource for whoever takes over your job (and will save them calling on you while you're busy trying to get to grips with your next post!)

Chemline Abroad

Chemline is set to expand overseas. We have had considerable interest from a number of European Fire Brigades and we are currently working out the details for a Europe-wide service. The biggest challenge is perhaps that of language, although I'm finding that many European Fire Officers are engineering or chemistry graduates with an excellent command of English. The other problem is one of logistics; in particular how to get potentially contaminated suits back from another country. However, we should be able to get around this with the help of Respirex's network of overseas agencies and contacts.

Subscription Increase.

As you probably know, the Chemline subscription rises annually at the start of January in order to keep pace with the RPI. This year's increase is just 3%.

Chemline for All?

A number of brigades have asked how long it will be before there is a national Chemline subscription for all English Brigades. Indeed, this has already happened in Scotland with the Scottish New Dimensions Project paying a group membership on behalf of all Brigades North of the border. This has yet to happen in England and Wales, though with around 70% of English brigades already members a national subscription would certainly make sense. Perhaps it's time for some informed lobbying?

Julien Hollingshurst