

## Panel Session - Rachel McCann



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# Introduction

- Head of Emergency Planning and Civil Contingency Response for UK Health and Safety Regulator
- Former Head of Onshore Major Hazard Chemical and Land Use Planning Policy
- Chair of OECD Working Party on Chemical Accidents, former Working Group on Implementation member of UNECE TEIA Convention and former UK representative to Seveso Expert Group
- My team ensures HSE is able and prepared to respond to major accidents and civil contingency events, and contributes to cross government civil contingency planning, preparedness and response
- Is a regulator and policy maker for major and non-hazard industries, chemicals, biocides, pesticides and provides technical and scientific advice for policy development

# Q1 - What are the challenges ahead to ensure a high level of safety and health at hazardous installations using chemicals ?



- Accidents continue to happen
- We must ensure that prevention, preparedness and response remains focus for government, industry and international organisations
- Major accident hazard prevention has not been solved
- Three key challenges;
  - Ageing – much of our sector is old creating challenges around maintenance costs, upgraded costs and managing incremental changes
  - Automation / Remote control – brings fantastic opportunity to also risks. Industry and regulators must understand safety implications of technology
  - Emerging technologies / green agenda - huge sustainability benefits but risks of using chemicals in different ways and technology outstripping regulation

## Q2 - Why is it that the strengthening of programmes for the prevention, preparedness and response to chemical accidents remains an issue of high importance ? Why do major accidents continue to happen despite ongoing efforts ?



- Accidents continue to happen. In 2020 we have seen;
  - 3 deaths at a Chemical plant explosion in Spain
  - 38 deaths in a distribution warehouse fire in Korea
  - 11 deaths in a gas leak at a chemical factory in India
  - 200 deaths, 6000 injuries and massive damage following Beirut explosion
  - More than 20 fires leading to over 70 deaths in hospitals linked to oxygen use treating Covid patients
- We can't eradicate chemical accident risk as our modern society benefits from the use of substances and the products they create. Though legislation can help reduce risk and mitigate effects
- We don't learn from past accidents. There are rarely 'new' causes
- Temptation to view chemical accident hazards as 'old' and no longer relevant

### **Q3 - In your experience, what are the most essential elements of an effective chemical accident prevention, preparedness and response program at the national level ?**



- Communication and co-operation – national programmes will involve many different actors with relevant responsibilities and expertise. They must work together to create a cohesive framework
- Learning Lessons – within ministries, countries or internationally. Use the excellent structures that exist in this international community
- Leadership – strong leadership in the management of safety is crucial in setting and developing a good safety culture
- Focus on prevention – best thing we can do to reduce the effects of accidents is stop them happening. Identification of major hazard risks is the crucial first step allowing preventive and mitigation measures to be developed and implemented