

Sybron Chemicals Inc.: Background Information

In the fall of 1988, Sybron Chemicals, a small chemical speciality manufacturer with headquarters and a plant in Birmingham, New Jersey, released 40 pounds of ethyl acrylate, a gas with an overwhelmingly acrid odor, to the surrounding community*. About one hour later, citizens began calling local officials with complaints of the stench. Seven went to the hospital for treatment of eye irritation. Without clear information

about the seriousness of the situation, the local fire company roused more than 60 nearby residents from their beds and evacuated them to the local fire hall until the next morning. Several months later, the company suffered an unrelated, small chemical flash fire that severely burned two workers. As a result of these incidents, there were calls from the surrounding neighborhood for a shut-down of the plant.

* Ethyl acrylate is known primarily as an eye and skin irritant that can be smelled at very low concentrations. It poses a low degree of hazard if there is intermittent exposure at low concentrations likely in the ambient environment. It is listed by the National Toxicology Program as an oral carcinogen (based on animal studies), but there are insufficient data to determine whether inhalation or dermal contact is potentially carcinogenic.

Problem:

You and the members of your group are employees of Sybron Chemical Inc. The company's president has presented your work group with the task of developing a risk communication strategy. A new risk communication approach is needed because the community is very upset about the two accidents that have recently occurred at Sybron. You have been given a copy of options for communicating information about company risks. Please consider the options and decide which would be most appropriate for creating an effective risk communication plan for this situation.

Helpful Definitions:

ambient—surrounding

carcinogen—any substance capable of producing or inducing cancer

dermal—of the skin

Source: Excerpted with permission from Chess, Caron; Alex Saville; Michal Tamuz; et al., "The Organizational Links Between Risk Communication and Risk Management: The Case of Sybron Chemicals Inc." *Risk Analysis* 12, no. 3 (1992): 432-33. © 1992 by Society for Risk Analysis.