

## DDPS EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM



### History

In 1994 and 1995, the Aum sect carried out two insidious attacks on the Japanese population. The attackers released the nerve gas sarin in the cities of Matsumoto and Tokyo. This was the first ever instance of parties outside the government using a chemical weapon for terrorist attacks. In response to this troubling new development, the SPIEZ LABORATORY joined forces with the Army's NBC Centre of Competence to create an emergency response team. The DDPS Emergency Response Team has been at the ready since 1 January 2000 to support cantonal response teams in the event of suspected use of chemical weapons.

### New C-Emergency Response Team

The team was reorganised in 2009 with a view to strengthening the capabilities of the emergency response organisation and expanding the support services available to emergency response personnel. The new C-team came into being in January 2010. It can rapidly provide expert advice by telephone, round the clock, should an incident occur. This is particularly important given that the action taken in the first few minutes after an incident involving nerve agents has a decisive influence on the outcome. In addition to providing expert advice, the C-team can also send a team of four experts to the incident location. These experts are trained to deal with chemical weapons and able to move around the contamination zone safely. They carry out initial tests on site with their measuring equipment, determine the extent of the contamination zone and the degree of contamination, and take samples for more in-depth testing at the SPIEZ LABORATORY. They also carry nerve agent antidotes with them in case the paramedics' stocks run out.

The SPIEZ LABORATORY has developed its own support apparatus for providing expert advice. Each advisor has a wide range of technical documentation stored on his or her personal digital assistant, which can be accessed at

any time, wherever the advisor may be. This electronic tool is also available, of course, on all C-team computers.

### Call-outs

The C-team is called out by the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), which can alert C-team members at any time by pager, mobile or landline. In special cases, the alarm can also be raised directly via the SPIEZ LABORATORY's security lodge, which is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Members

The C-team currently has 21 volunteer members. All are employees of the SPIEZ LABORATORY and the Army's NBC Centre of Competence. To ensure that they are always suitably prepared, they undergo extensive training every year and take part in exercises together with the emergency services.

### Deployment options

The C-team is deployed on request and by agreement with local emergency services coordinators. It provides the coordinators with on-site support as required and instructed. Expert advice is made available quickly once the alarm is raised, and the team of experts leaves the NBC Centre within one hour at the very latest. Two trucks and two minibuses are available to transport equipment and personnel. The option of helicopter-based deployment is currently being evaluated.

### Outlook

Efforts to optimise the Emergency Response Team will continue over the next two years. The radiological response team (A-team) will bring together the existing emergency response organisations of the SPIEZ LABORATORY and the NBC-Centre of Competence. The biological response team (B-team), meanwhile, will be at the ready once the new biosafety laboratory BSL4 is operational. ◆



*Incident response vehicle with a member of the rapid intervention team (Image: SPIEZ LABORATORY)*



*Incident response team exercise in Thun, Switzerland (Image: SPIEZ LABORATORY)*