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Responding to chemical weapons violations in Syria: Legal, health education and humanitarian recommendation

The repeated use of prohibited chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict poses serious health, humanitarian and security threats to civilians, healthcare personnel and first responders. Moreover, the use of chemical weapons constitutes a clear and egregious violation of international law likely amounting to a war crime for which continued impunity is setting a dangerous precedent in relation to current and future conflicts. This debate article calls upon concerned states, organizations and individuals to respond urgently and unequivocally to this serious breach of international legal and humanitarian norms. Based on health, humanitarian and legal findings, this article calls for concrete action to: (1) Reduce the risk of chemical weapons being used in current and future conflicts; (2) review and support the preparedness equipment and antidote supplies of first responders, humanitarian organizations and military forces operating in Syria; (3) support international mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing the prohibition on chemical weapons, including through criminal accountability; (4) support civilian victims of chemical weapons attacks, including refugees; and (5) re-commit to the complete elimination of chemical weapons in compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993), a comprehensive treaty that bans chemical weapons and requires their complete destruction. All involved states and organizations should take urgent steps to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable victims of conflict, including victims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria and to reinforce international law in the face of such serious violations.

Biography

Timothy B Erickson is a new HHI Core Faculty Member with expertise in environmental toxicology and crisis in climate change. He is an Emergency Medicine Physician at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston where he serves as the Chief of Medical Toxicology in the Department of Emergency Medicine. He has earned his MD degree from The Chicago Medical School in 1986. He has completed Emergency Medicine Residency training at the University of Illinois and his Medical Toxicology Fellowship at Cook County Hospital in Chicago. He is a Fellow of the American College of Emergency Physicians, American College of Medical Toxicology, American Academy of Clinical Toxicology and the prestigious National Geographic Explorers Club. Previously, he served as the Director for the UIC Center for Global Health and Professor of Emergency Medicine and Medical Toxicology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has been a Member of multiple Editorial Boards and has a prolific academic history including publishing over 120 original journal articles and book chapters as well as editing 4 major textbooks. He has presented over 100 national and international invited lectures related to emergency medicine, toxicology, humanitarian global health and wilderness/expedition medicine.

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