

# Chemical and Biological News

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## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Styrene Gas Leak in India

LG Polymers, the Indian Unit of South Korea's LG Chemicals, that operated its plant at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh suffered Styrene gas leak before dawn on 7 May 2020. The resultant vapour cloud spread over a radius of about 3 kilometres, affecting nearby areas. The death toll was thirteen besides leaving over 1000 exposed to the gas. Preliminary reports reveal that the cause could be maintenance failures, operating errors, and improper storage of the toxic styrene gas, may have led to the tragedy.

Styrene, the gas leaked is an important commercial chemical, which is used in making make plastics, paints, synthetic rubber, insulation, fibreglass, pipes, automobile parts, food containers and disposal cups and is harmful if inhaled in excess quantity.

*See: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/lg-polymers-admits-leaking-vapor-from-gas-storage-tank-caused-vizag-tragedy-11589009346537.html>*

### Specialist in Biological and Chemical Warfare dies of COVID-19

Julian Perry Robinson, who has died aged 78, combined academic research with behind-the-scenes advocacy to enhance controls on some of the most inhumane weapons in the world. His focus was on issues related to chemical and biological warfare (CBW) and the international efforts to

eradicate the use or possession of such weapons.

During the cold war differences between the major powers on the control of biological weapons, he examined the challenges of CBW in factual terms rather than the rhetoric of the time. A key concept Julian promoted – that all disease-causing organisms and the toxins they produce should be considered biological weapons, unless held for clearly peaceful purposes – became the core of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, the first treaty to ban a whole class of weapons of mass destruction. This concept, which became known as the “general purpose criterion”, has meant the convention has not been overtaken by scientific and technological developments. He also facilitated the common understanding in the Geneva negotiations that resulted in the Biological Weapons Convention.

*See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/julian-perry-robinson-obituary>*

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

### First Report by IIT Released by OPCW

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released the findings of Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on 8 April 2020. The IIT is responsible for identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic where the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has determined that chemical weapons have been used or likely used in Syria.

The IIT's first report sets out its mandate, the legal and practical challenges of its work, and the findings of the investigations conducted between June 2019 and March 2020, focusing on the incidents in Ltamenah, Syrian Arab Republic on 24, 25, and 30 March 2017. The IIT's investigation and analysis included a comprehensive review of all of the information obtained including: interviews with persons who were present in the relevant places at the time of the incidents, analysis of samples and remnants collected at the sites of the incidents, review of the symptomatology reported by casualties and medical staff, examination of imagery, including satellite images, and extensive consultation of experts. The investigation relied on relevant FFM reports as well as on samples and other material obtained directly by the Technical Secretariat in the territory of Syria.

*See: <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2020/04/opcw-releases-first-report-investigation-and-identification-team>*