



This award recognises efforts to protect civilians from the effects of chemical weapons incidents, a topic given even greater significance by the nerve agent attack in Salisbury this year.

Amid raised terror threat levels in the UK and the US, the University of Hertfordshire's toxicology research group was asked by the US Department of Health and Human Services to investigate decontamination processes and to develop policy guidance for emergency response teams in the event of chemical attack.

The resulting project was undertaken by a team of 16 full-time research staff led by the head of toxicology, Robert Chilcott. Hertfordshire invested in large-scale testing facilities to allow researchers to simulate human exposure to hazardous substances and to evaluate mass casualty decontamination outcomes.

The team developed a response to chemical exposure that, unlike some traditional approaches, does not allow potential absorption of toxic materials through the skin. The process was found to be 99.9 per cent effective in removing chemical contamination.

The findings contributed to guidance on how UK emergency services should respond to such incidents, which, the judges noted, would have been followed for the Salisbury attack in March.

The project, which also highlighted a need for guidelines for treating disabled people affected by chemical incidents, has been praised by NHS leaders and US Department of Health and UK Home Office officials.

A Home Office official said that the work by Professor Chilcott and his team was "fundamental, not only in the area of mass decontamination but also in the ability of local emergency teams to effectively respond to individual chemical assaults using corrosive materials".