Preparedness and response of oil spills from ships – All regional seas

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Preventing and managing natural hazards and technological (human-made) hazards

2. Key Approaches

- Knowledge-based
- Socio-economic
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The organisations in the case study are experts in oil spill preparedness and response and can share that knowledge via capacity building and shared knowledge and experience.

4. Overview of the case

The increase in shipping and the rapidly rising amounts of oil being transported by sea means that there is increased risk of accidents involving oil pollution. While overall responsibility for oil spill preparedness is covered by international Conventions, co-operation occurs at regional level in Europe are important.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Oil is an extremely toxic substance, containing between 100 and 200 known carcinogens. Oil spills can cause substantial damage to the environment. In general, spills belong to two main categories: oil spills due to accidents, and illegal oil releases from platforms or ships, for instance from flushing of the ship's tanks. Early warning of oil spills can help reduce the damage to the environment by identifying the amount of clean up needed. A study by the International Tankers Owners Pollution Federation (ITOPF) assessed the level of risk of an oil spill and the level of preparedness. Regions in Europe such as the North and Baltic Seas have high levels of risk and preparedness. At the other end of the scale, the Black Sea was rated with a high risk and low levels of preparedness. The Mediterranean region has a high risk of oil spill with a medium risk of preparedness.

The overall responsibility for oil spill preparedness is covered by the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC), which was adopted in November 1990. It is designed to help Governments combat major oil pollution incidents. The Convention became international law in May 1995. The Convention is designed to facilitate international co-operation and mutual assistance in preparing for and responding to a major oil pollution incident and to encourage States to develop and maintain an adequate capability to deal with oil pollution emergencies. Oil spill preparedness and response is very specialised and expensive. Additionally there are very often-cross border issues. Therefore, for economies of scale and for cross border co-operation, regional organisation is a sensible option.

b) Objectives

The objectives of this case study are to illustrate the levels of oil spill preparedness and response in the Mediterranean and

Baltic regions.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The objective of Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) is to contribute to preventing and reducing pollution from ships and combating pollution in case of emergency. The Centre will also assist the Contracting Parties which so request in mobilising the regional and international assistance in case of an emergency under the Offshore Protocol, should this instrument enter into force. HELCOM (for the Baltic Sea) manage their responsibilities through a monitored working programme and carry out regular international exercises to strength regional co-operation and which act as training events.

b) ICZM tools

Since REMPEC's objectives and functions include assisting the Mediterranean coastal States in each of the phases of the development of their national systems, one of the most important activities of REMPEC, since its establishment in December 1976, has been providing this type of assistance to the individual coastal States which so request. Developing and consolidating an effective national system for preparedness for, and response to, marine pollution incidents is a complex and continuous process. It comprises setting up an organisational framework for dealing with marine pollution incidents, based on a political decision to do so, preparation of a national contingency plan and related local contingency plans, training personnel designated to respond to pollution incidents, and acquisition of basic pollution response equipment and products.

The working programme of HELCOM RESPONSE covers many issues:

- Maintain and further develop the standing operational network for trans-national co-operation in case of incidents,
- Implement a three-tier approach to ensure adequate response to incidents in the Baltic Sea Area, with a special focus on the sub-regional level,
- Enhance co-operation with regard to places of refuge,
- Detection, investigation and prosecution of anti-pollution regulations,
- Ensure information exchange about, and investigate the need for, additional response measures for offshore activities,
- Collect information/exchange experience/promote development and use of new technology and best practices.

They have two manuals, one covering oil spills and the second covering chemical spills. In both cases acquisition and sharing of knowledge, technical know-how , assisting aid and training are part of the organisational functions.

7. Cost and resources

REMPEC is funded by the IMO and UNEP. It allocated additional financial resources from its Mediterranean Trust Fund budget in order to extend these actions to Mediterranean coastal States which are not MEDA/SAFEMED eligible countries and not EU member States, namely Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. HELCOM is funded by its contracting partners.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The existence of reliable national systems for preparedness and response, including administrative organisation, trained personnel, basic equipment and in particular contingency plans for combating marine pollution incidents, is considered to be the single most important factor which determines the effectiveness and the success of response to marine pollution incidents.

9. Success and Fail factors

Perception of the risk is sometimes a factor in the degree of preparedness (negative and positive).

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Most Oil spill preparedness and response plans have now lead to strategies for chemical spills.

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13. Sources

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