

SPILL NOTIFICATION POINT

<u>Two spill notification points</u> (Coastguard Centres):	
Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre (MRCC) Maritiem Plein 3 B-8400 Ostend	Tel: +32 59 701 000/100 (emergencies only) +32 59 34 10 20 (gen.) Fax: +32 59 70 36 05 E-mail: mrcc@mrcc.be
Maritime Information Crosspoint (MIK) Graaf Jansdijk 1 B-8380 Zeebrugge	24 hr Tel: +32 50 55 83 34/35/24 Fax: +32 50 55 83 19 E-mail: mik@mil.be

COMPETENT NATIONAL AUTHORITY

Federal Public Service Environment (Oil & HNS) DG Environment – Marine Environment Place Victor Horta 40 B-1060 Brussels	Tel (office hrs): +32 2 524 96 27/28 24 hr Tel (via MIK): + 32 50 55 83 34/35/24 Fax (office hrs): +32 2 524 96 43 Fax (24hr, via MIK): +32 50 55 83 19
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RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS

Alerting procedures – role of Coastguard Centres

Two distinct Coastguard Centres have recently been established, the Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre (MRCC), under responsibility of the Flemish Region and the Maritime Information Crosspoint (MIK) within the Naval Operations Command, operated by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of the federal authorities. Both centres work closely together but cover distinct fields:

1. The MRCC has a coordinating role in the field of search and rescue and maritime safety, and acts as Coastal Station for Belgium under IMO. Upon receiving a maritime distress message of (the risk of) serious marine pollution, the MRCC will immediately inform the MIK and alert other services following procedures laid down in the national contingency plan for the North Sea ("Rampenplan Noordzee"; NCP) and additional operational plans.
2. The MIK (within Navy Operations Command) at Zeebrugge supports and coordinates actions of the various competent authorities in the field of law enforcement and maritime security, and acts on behalf of Belgium as National Contact Point under the Bonn Agreement, an international agreement by North Sea coastal states and the European Community to offer mutual assistance and cooperation in combating pollution. International marine pollution reports from Bonn Agreement Contracting Parties received by the MIK are passed on to the MRCC and to the various competent national authorities involved, in particular the DG Environment and the Management Unit of North Sea Mathematical Models (MUMM, Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences).

Incident Management and Response

National responsibility for dealing with marine pollution incidents at sea is a federal competency which primarily rests with the federal Minister who is in charge of marine environmental matters. In case of an environmental emergency at sea, the DG Environment (Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment) will act on his behalf and will initiate and coordinate response activities.

In case of a catastrophic event, including severe pollution incidents, the NCP is activated. The management of the response to such an event is then placed under the coordination of the Province Governor of West-Flanders. The NCP stipulates the general structure of intervention and response and covers oil and other hazardous substances. Additional operational plans have recently been developed on oil pollution combating at sea and on the shoreline, and also for oiled seabirds, enhancing Belgium's level of preparedness against oil pollution.

The general structure of the NCP can be summarised as follows:

- In the "initial alarm" phase of the NCP, a Command Post is set up by the MRCC and all information concerning the incident is centralised. As soon as a Navy vessel is on the scene, it takes charge as On Scene Commander at sea (OSC, afloat).
- In a "full alarm" phase, the operational Command Post is placed under the authority of the Province Governor as General Co-ordinator of the response with representatives of the MRCC, the Navy (Ministry of Defence), the DG Environment, the MUMM; the Civil Protection (Federal Ministry of the Interior); the Maritime Police (Federal Ministry of Interior) and other services if necessary. The Head of the MRCC coordinates search and rescue operations and the Commander of the Navy coordinates pollution combating operations at sea. For incidents having a possible impact on port activities, the concerned harbour master is responsible for taking the appropriate measures. For implications on shore and inland, the Province Governor coordinates the response in close cooperation with the coastal municipalities, the emergency services (fire brigades, hospitals, Civil Protection, Police and Army) and the nature protection organisations looking after oiled wildlife.

The additional operational plans describe the more practical aspects of operational cooperation and response actions in more detail. At operational level, the DG Environment owns the Belgian stockpile of pollution combating equipment and is responsible for its deployment (both mechanical recovery and dispersants). It is assisted by the MUMM (for surveillance, scientific evaluation and monitoring, and authorisation of dispersant use), the Civil Protection (trained response personnel and logistics, for coastal protection and clean-up), the Navy (communications, trained response personnel and sea-going support) and the Flemish region (communications and sea-going support).

Port authorities are responsible for clean-up operations of minor pollutions in their waterways and harbour basins. If a pollution incident in port threatens the adjacent coastline, the Province Governor, Civil Protection and DG Environment may also be involved. A major pollution incident in port may lead to the activation of the NCP. The shorelines are owned by the regional government (Flemish Region), but by a long-standing agreement they are managed by the coastal municipalities. Therefore, in case of minor pollution at local level, the municipal authorities are responsible for the protection and clean-up of the shores. However, municipal authorities can call upon the assistance of the Civil Protection and the response equipment of DG Environment when the locally available resources are insufficient or inadequate for responding to the incident in an efficient way.

RESPONSE POLICY

Pursuant to the provisions of the Belgian federal law on the protection of the marine areas under Belgian jurisdiction, the main strategy for oil pollution response at sea is mechanical recovery although dispersant use is also considered as a second option and may be authorised in an emergency situation, for instance if the oil is likely to significantly impact bird breeding/wintering habitats or sensitive coastal habitats and resources. Most small spillages however are left to disperse naturally, in particular when no resources are threatened. The use of dispersant in Belgian waters is only permitted when authorised by MUMM (after consideration of advantages and disadvantages of response options) and only under its control. Belgium does not have its own scheme of approval for the specific dispersant formulations which may be used but relies on those approved by the Bonn Agreement countries.

In sheltered waters, containment of the oil using booms and mechanical recovery of the oil is clearly preferred by the Belgian authorities. On the shoreline dispersants are not used; physical removal of stranded oil is regarded as the most appropriate clean-up method.

EQUIPMENT

Government

Although the length of its coastline is very limited (65 km), Belgium is adjacent to the Strait of Dover and two major shipping lanes cross the shallow Belgian waters. The intense traffic in the narrow shipping lanes creates a serious risk for pollution mainly resulting from collisions. Recognising this marine pollution risk, the DG Environment purchased and keeps ready for deployment a comprehensive stock of pollution response equipment consisting of mechanical recovery equipment (more than 2000 m booms, 20 skimmers with pumps, powerpacks and tubes, spillcats), beach clean-up containers, storage tanks, sorbents, and a stock of dispersants (10 m³ Slickgone NS, 10 m³ Correxite) and dispersant spraying devices. Part of this equipment is also suitable for response to an HNS pollution incident. The pollution combating equipment is kept in two stockpiles, the first in the port of Ostend, the second at the Civil Protection Unit of Jabbeke. The DG Environment is responsible for the deployment of this equipment, with seagoing support from the Navy and Flemish Region (with vessels of opportunity), onshore support from the Civil Protection, and aerial support (reconnaissance, guidance) from MUMM.

For larger spills exceeding the national response capacity, Belgium can activate the mutual assistance mechanisms of the Bonn Agreement in order to mobilise additional response means from the neighbouring countries (the Netherlands, France and the UK). Whenever possible, the responsible party representing the interests of the vessel that has caused the pollution will be requested to contract private companies in order to assist in the response to the spill (or risk of spill) under the supervision of the Belgian authorities.

Private

Belgium does not have any contracts for pollution combating equipment or vessels with private companies.

The private salvage company URS, based in Antwerp, operates several vessels which have salvage equipment on board for fire-fighting, re-floating of grounded or sunken ships and wreck removal. URS also operates a multi-purpose salvage vessel that can be chartered for oil pollution response. She is equipped with dispersant-spraying gear, two sweeping arms, and brush skimmers, and has an on-board storage capacity of about 300 m³. The vessel participated in the international response to the PRESTIGE oil spill in 2002-2003 and was engaged as first-line oil combating vessel on the site of the TRICOLOR wreck-removal operation off Dunkirk, France in the period 2003-2004. The major oil terminals in the port of Antwerp have some equipment, including dispersant, to meet their own requirements but no formal agreement exists whereby this equipment could be pooled in the event of a larger incident.

PREVIOUS SPILL EXPERIENCE

Belgium recently had to deal with the TRICOLOR incident in the Dover Strait (2002-2004). Following a collision with another vessel, the ro-ro car carrier TRICOLOR sank on the spot in a shallow, densely navigated shipping lane located off Dunkirk in French waters in the immediate vicinity of the Belgian area of jurisdiction. An estimated total volume of about 500 m³ of HFO was released into the marine environment. From the moment of the initial collision in December 2002 until the end of the salvage works in 2004 there was a continuous risk of marine pollution arising from the risk of collision with the wreck and the risk of further oil releases during the salvage operations to remove the wreck.

Belgian coastal clean-up strike teams also participated in the international response to the PRESTIGE oil spill in Galicia, Spain (2002-2003).

HAZARDOUS & NOXIOUS SUBSTANCES (HNS)

The competent authority for dealing with marine pollution involving HNS is the DG Environment, which can be assisted with scientific advice, environmental impact assessment and monitoring by MUMM. On an operational level, the Belgian Coastguard is responsible. The Civil Protection is in charge of response teams and logistics support and the Maritime Inspectorate provides support on ship safety issues and nautical advice. The Navy can also be called upon for communications, command and control and logistics issues. Belgium's capability for responding to HNS incidents at sea is limited and mainly relies on the same resources as for oil pollution response. Previous incidents include the HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE (1997, mixed packaged hazardous substances) and EVER DECENT (1999, containers on fire, toxic gas cloud, dioxins). The development of HNS response capacity is currently in progress and future work involves preparing specific operational plans for HNS response at sea to complement the NCP. (Information from EMSA, 2008)

CONVENTIONS

Prevention & Safety					Spill Response		Compensation						
MARPOL 73/78		Annexes III, IV, V, VI			OPRC '90	OPRC -HNS	CLC '69	CLC '76	CLC '92	Fund '92	Supp Fund	HNS*	Bunker
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓

REGIONAL AND BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

Bonn Agreement (with countries bordering the North Sea).
Member of the European Community Task Force.

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