

Exercise : leak on a cross-border pipeline

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on the Transboundary Effects on Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) applies to the prevention of, the preparedness for and response to industrial accidents with possibility of causing transboundary effects. This includes the effects of such accidents caused by natural disasters.

In addition, the Convention has provisions concerning international cooperation on mutual assistance, research and development, exchange of information and exchange of technology. In this framework Parties are encouraged to create and maintain bi- and multi-lateral agreements between themselves and with neighbouring countries.

The following paragraphs will illustrate the provisions of the Convention concerning preparedness, response, cooperation and exchange of information. These paragraphs will serve as a background for the brief description of a transboundary response exercise organised by Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania in 2014.

1. The provisions of the Convention concerning preparedness, response cooperation and exchange of information

The Industrial Accidents Convention indicates in its article 8 the duties of Parties concerning emergency preparedness to industrial accidents, capable of having transboundary consequences. In particular it requires Parties to:

- Take measures to establish and maintain adequate emergency preparedness (on-site by the operator and off-site by the relevant authorities);
- Provide to the other Parties the elements that they would need to elaborate contingency plans;
- Endeavour to make the off-site contingency plans compatible (among neighbouring countries);
- Regularly review the contingency plans.

In annex VII, the Convention provides further information for the implementation of its article 8. In particular:

- It requires Parties to provide on-site personnel, people who might be affected, off-site and rescue forces with the details of technical and organisational procedures;
- It lists examples of matters to be covered by contingency plan:
 - Arrangements for warning people or, when appropriate, to evacuate them;
 - Organisational roles and responsibilities on-site for dealing with an emergency;
 - A description of the equipment and resources available;
 - Arrangements for providing early warning to the authority responsible for the off-site emergency response;
 - Arrangements for training personnel.
- It lists examples of matters to be covered by off-site emergency plans such as:
 - Organisational roles and responsibilities off-site;
 - Methods and procedures to be followed by emergency and medical personnel;
 - Methods for rapidly determining the affected area;
 - Identification of resources needed to implement the off-site contingency plan;
 - Arrangements for providing information to the public;
 - Arrangements for training and exercises.

Article 11 of the Convention requires that Parties, in the event of an industrial accident, take adequate response measures and ensure that the effects are assessed. More specifically, article 11 states that “Parties concerned shall ensure that the effects are assessed – where appropriate, jointly – for the purpose of taking adequate response measures. The Parties concerned shall endeavour to coordinate their response measures”.

It also specifies that effects of an accident can have impact on human beings, flora and fauna, soil, water, air and landscape and it recommends that effects on material assets and cultural heritage are assessed, after an accident.



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The tasks and responsibilities outlined above, imply that parties must be able to conduct assessments of the effects of an industrial accident as a basis for taking adequate measures. Therefore Parties need to have a response policy and an organization for response. Such a policy will not be developed only for the response in the event of an industrial accident with transboundary consequences, but will be developed more generally for all kind of accidents and their effects on national, regional or local level.

At the same time, in its preamble, the Convention recognises “the importance and usefulness of bilateral and multilateral arrangements for the prevention of, preparedness for and response to the effects of industrial accidents”. The importance of bilateral or multilateral agreements and cooperation between Parties is furthermore reinforced through article 15 and annex XI, which include elements that can be subject of multilateral and bilateral cooperation:

- Measures and contingency plans at the appropriate level affecting other Parties;
- Measures taken regarding prevention of, preparedness for and response to industrial accidents;
- Emergency preparedness and response.

Finally, in article 24, entitled “Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements”, the Convention requires that Parties continue existing or enter into new bilateral or multilateral agreements or other arrangements. Furthermore, it states that the provisions of the Convention shall not affect the right of Parties to take, through bilateral or multilateral agreements, more stringent measures than those required by the Convention.

It is in the context outlined in the paragraphs above that Parties are encouraged to maintain and strengthen agreements and cooperation with neighbouring countries, especially with neighbouring Parties. In the framework of such agreements, meetings, training and exercises are organised not only involving authorities at central level, but also at regional and local level.

2. The exercise



The transboundary area between Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania is characterized by high concentration of chemical installations and dense transportation network which represents a potential threat of oil/chemical accidents in the region.

On 13 February 2014 at 10 a.m. a transboundary response exercise was started in Belarus. The scenario of the exercise had as a starting point an oil spill from a pipeline into the Dvina River and it involved in total 124 persons representing 27 units of three Parties to the Convention. The three Parties provided personnel and equipment to be used in the exercise.

The exercise was the concluding stage of a project involving Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania and concerning preparedness and response in a transboundary perspective. During the project, the three countries held several meetings, exchanged information about the respective legislation and organised training with the aim of strengthening response to industrial accidents with transboundary consequences.

The funding for the project was provided by the European Union, more specifically through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013 Cross Border Cooperation Programme Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus. This project, which was not the first one involving the three Parties, aimed at working together not only among the three countries’ authorities, but also with the operators, with the aim of minimising the effects of an oil spill in a river.

For this specific exercise it was decided that the scenario was to be based on an oil spill happening in winter. This was done on purpose to test the joint response capacities during the winter period, when rivers are covered with ice. Response capacities in summer had already been tested in previous exercises among the three countries.



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The exercise had two main stages. One was in Belarus, where the oil spill originated. In this site, 65 people from Belarus actively participated to the exercise, including the operator.

The responders (and in this case the operator had the main role) had the task of containing the spill and collecting the oil in reservoirs set up for the purpose.

It was also decided to consider the possibility of a transboundary effect, should the measures undertaken in the first stage not be sufficient to contain the spill. The second stage was then set up in Latvia, where a joint unit of 59 people (20 from Latvia, 10 from Lithuania, 29 from Belarus) actively took part to the

exercise. The aim was to contain the spill, de-contaminate the area and collect data. The joint unit was trained to respond to the accident.

The three countries decided that the scenario of the exercise and the exercise itself would test all the response chain. It also included aspects such as the installation of camps for the personnel and for the preparation of food. In the particular situation given by the winter scenario, extra equipment was needed for dealing with problems created by ice.

3. Lessons learnt

Transboundary response exercises, as transboundary response in real accidents, involve the cooperation of personnel from different countries, bringing with them their own equipment. Transporting equipment can be an issue for crossing the borders. In fact, customs regulations consider response equipment as goods crossing the border and therefore subject to its regulations. This aspect, especially when in a situation of emergency, can cause loss of precious time.

The three Parties taking part to the exercise decided, along with the development of the transboundary cooperation and further agreements, to develop a joint plan for emergency response that would also tackle the aspect of customs with the aim of accelerating the procedures and reduce the time needed for crossing the border.

The three Parties already made steps forward in their bilateral cooperation concerning visa issues for the response personnel crossing the border. Emergency visas can be obtained at the border for the emergency responders. This solution was achieved through bilateral agreements among the three Parties.



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Partner organizations for more information about the exercise:

- Latvia: State Fire and Rescue Service of Latvia (Riga);
- Lithuania: Utena Country Fire and Rescue Board (Utena);
- Belarus; Vitebsk Regional Department of the Ministry for Emergency Situations of Belarus (Vitebsk), State Fire Rescue Institution "Republican Special Response Team" of the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk) and associates: Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk), State Institution "Republican Centre for Emergency Management and Response" of the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk).

