

## UNITED KINGDOM

### 18.1 UK NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR COMBATING OIL POLLUTION INCIDENTS

#### 18.1.1 RESPONSIBILITIES

(i) Major pollution incidents affect many interests both within and outside Government. The main organisations likely to become involved in the direction of counter pollution operations and their responsibilities are as follows:

(ii) Department for Transport (DfT)

The DfT has the main responsibility for exercising central Government's response to an oil or chemical pollution incident inside the UK Pollution Control Zone. The lead role is taken by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), an executive agency of DfT which is responsible for taking action to deal with marine pollution from shipping and offshore installations, and for providing advice and assistance to, and co-ordination of, local authorities for clean-up on shore.

(iii) Local Authorities

Generally, coastal local authorities take the lead in dealing with pollution which comes ashore. They currently have no statutory responsibility to do so. However they do have a duty to assess the risk of an emergency occurring, and to prepare and maintain plans where they consider it necessary or desirable to act to prevent, reduce, control or mitigate the emergency's effect. In a major incident local authorities would be provided with assistance from the MCA.

(iv) Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence is responsible for dealing with oil spills from its own ships wherever they may be, and for all spills which occur within the limits of naval bases.

(v) Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

The DTI, with advice from the MCA, is responsible for policy on the control of pollution from offshore installations whose operators are required to provide resources and deal with spills. If an operator's resources proved inadequate to cope with a spill and coastal pollution was threatened, the MCA might take over control of the clean-up operations.

(vi) Port and Harbour Authorities

Port and Harbour authorities have statutory responsibility, under the Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Co-operation Convention (OPRC), for clean-up operations within their port areas. If any pollution spreads outwards into the open sea or threatens the adjacent coastline, the MCA and local authorities would be involved.

#### 18.1.2 BROAD APPROACH

The central objective of all counter pollution activities is to minimise damage to human health, wildlife, fisheries, ecologically sensitive areas and amenity beaches. The MCA maintains the National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations (NCP) and resources to cover its at-sea clean up responsibility. It also maintains specialised beach cleaning equipment for deployment as agreed with local authorities; funds a research programme relating to both at-sea and on-shore clean-up; disseminates the results of that research to interested parties; advises local authorities on their contingency

plans; approves plans for ports and harbours in accordance with OPRC and advises DTI on approval of contingency plans for offshore operators. The MCA also provides training to local authority staff in beach cleaning management and techniques. Note: the NCP is in the process of being refreshed and the updated version is expected to be finalised by the end of 2005. The current NCP was effective as of 01 January 2000.

### **18.1.3 ORGANISATION**

Standing arrangements exist to channel reports of incidents causing or threatening pollution to the MCA. MCA informs the relevant environmental regulator, fisheries, statutory nature conservation body, local authorities and other bodies of such reports.

**18.1.4** During a major counter pollution incident involving a ship casualty, the MCA Director of Operations exercises overall control of counter pollution operations. Agency staff are deployed to a convenient location close to the incident where local command of at-sea operations would be established. In a major coastal pollution incident, a Shoreline Response Centre may be established at the request of the local authorities, to co-ordinate and lead the on-shore response.

### **18.1.5 COMBATING POLLUTION AT SEA**

The primary response for combating oil at sea in the conditions prevalent around the UK coastline is spraying with dispersant. The UK has a small fleet of contracted aircraft, ready for fitting with spray gear, and available at 6 hours notice at all times. They can be deployed quickly to any part of the UK pollution control zone (out to 200 nautical miles). MCA also maintains stockpiles of oil recovery equipment. Two additional dedicated surveillance aircraft, suitably fitted for oil detection provide direction and control of at sea clean-up operations. These aircraft also fly dedicated ship and oil rig patrols.

### **18.1.6 PREVENTING OR MINIMISING POLLUTION AT SEA**

Primary responsibility for dealing with the situation on board a shipping casualty which causes or threatens to cause oil pollution rests with the owners and the commercial salvors. The MCA, however, keeps closely in touch with what is proposed to ensure that the wider public interest in preventing or minimising pollution is taken fully into account. If necessary the Secretary of State's Representative for Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP) invokes the powers of the Secretary of State to intervene and give directions to the master/salvor/harbour master, or even take direct action.

**18.1.7** Transferring the oil from the damaged vessel, either where she happens to be or at some more favourable location, may be an attractive way to tackle the problem and the MCA has cargo transfer equipment available for this purpose.

**18.1.8** The MCA also maintains Emergency Towing Vessels (ETVs) at the following stations: Dover Strait (jointly funded with French authorities), South West Approaches, The Minch and the Pentland Firth.

### **18.1.9 COMBATING POLLUTION ON-SHORE**

The MCA maintains stockpiles of more specialised equipment which can be made available to local authorities.

### **18.1.10 INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

Contact telephone, fax and telex numbers can be found at:  
<http://www.bonnagreement.org/eng/html/contractingparties/contactpoints.htm>.