

## FRANCE – NATIONAL ORGANISATION

### 13.1. INTRODUCTION

France has decided not to form a single multi-purpose force to combat accidental pollution in the marine environment. Co-ordination of the existing services is considered the most suitable means to conduct operations.

#### 13.1.1. Context

Metropolitan France has three seaboard, Channel/North Sea, Atlantic, Mediterranean. The maritime traffic along these coasts is heavy, about 45,000 ships every year in the Channel and 8,000 in the French zone of the Mediterranean Sea. The risk of pollution is high, as is shown by the fact that, during the last two decades, 35 significant cases of accidents at sea have resulted in actual pollution or risk of pollution. Since 1967, eleven major accidents have caused oil pollution on French coasts. Among the most serious accidents at world level, seven affected the French coastline, either because of an accident at sea occurring near the French coast (Amoco Cadiz, Gino, Erika, Ievoli Sun) or an accident occurring in a neighbouring country causing an oil slick to drift towards the French seaboard (Torrey Canyon in England, Haven in Italy, Prestige in Spain). These examples show the vulnerability of the French coast to the risks from maritime traffic.

#### 13.1.2. General description of the French national system

The French response to accidental marine pollution is organised by the POLMAR Instruction dated 4 March 2002, applicable not only to oil pollution but also to discharges of any substance likely to damage the marine environment. The instruction is an update of two earlier ones, dated respectively 17 December 1997 and 12 October 1978.

The instruction relates to response to pollution of the marine environment resulting from an accident or damage which involves or may involve an oil spill or a spill of some other product. Three types of measure are taken:

- Prevention measures to avoid such pollution occurring in the first place;
- Preparatory response measures to allow the responsible authorities to be given the resources to respond rapidly in the case of accidents;
- response measures intended to limit the consequences.

The national system makes a distinction between response to pollution at sea and response to pollution on land. The application of the POLMAR Plan (Sea) is entrusted to the Maritime Prefects (Commanders-in-Chief of the Navy) under the authority of the Prime Minister. The application of the POLMAR Plan (Land) is the responsibility of the Prefects of the “Départements” concerned, under the supervision of the Minister for the Interior. Action undertaken at sea is the responsibility of the Maritime Prefects. Action undertaken in the coastal strip from land is the responsibility of the Prefects of the “Départements”. The structure in charge of operations comprises representatives of all the Government Departments concerned and appropriate technical bodies, in particular CEDRE, the “Centre de Documentation, de Recherche et d’Expérimentations sur les Pollutions Accidentelles des Eaux (Centre for Documentation, Research and Experimentation on accidental water pollution). In view of the number of ministries involved in the response operations, the general guidelines adopted are proposed to the Secrétariat Général de la Mer (Secretariat General for the Sea) which is responsible to the Prime Minister.

### 13.2. NATIONAL ORGANISATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Maritime Prefect is responsible for organising and directing operations at sea within the boundaries of his own region. When a disaster or a threat of disaster is of such gravity or complexity

that response by ordinary means is not possible, the Maritime Prefect sets in motion the POLMAR Plan (Sea). This Plan gives access to the POLMAR fund which is managed by the Ministry of the Environment. This enables state resources to be supplemented with private resources, either contracted or requisitioned.

The Maritime Prefect reports to the Prime Minister (Secretariat General of the Sea), the Minister for Defence, the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Transport. The Minister of the Interior and the Prefects of the “Départements” and the civil protection zones which may be concerned are also informed. The Maritime Prefect simultaneously informs Cedre, whose technical advisors and resources are immediately placed at his disposal. The initiation and the termination of the POLMAR Plan (Sea) are the subject of decrees issued by the Maritime Prefect.

The Departmental Prefect is responsible to the Minister for the Interior both for the initiation and the execution of the pollution response operations.

Every coastal department draws up and updates, under the Prefect’s authority, a special POLMAR Plan (Land), in close consultation with the local official representatives and users of the marine environment. Each plan defines the general organisation of pollution response, permitting the mobilisation and coordination of all the available resources. It includes an inventory of the anti-pollution equipment and products available, a list of the zones to be protected as a matter of priority, and plans for the deployment and maintenance of anti-pollution booms. The Plan also provides for the establishment of an inventory of storage sites and centres for treatment of the waste to be recovered.

The special POLMAR Plan (Land) is launched by the Prefect, under the authority of the Minister for the Interior, only for exceptionally widespread pollution. Small-scale and medium-scale pollution is dealt with by the local communities within the context of their general powers as provided in the Local Authorities Code.

### **13.2.1. Operational organisation**

The Maritime Prefect directs all control operations at sea. Action is supervised from a command post located at the Maritime Prefecture (permanent headquarters). In order to facilitate the supervision of operations on the spot, an advance command post (operational headquarters) may be installed at the most favourable location. The Maritime Prefect keeps the Prefects of the “Départements” informed of developments regarding any threat of pollution to the coast, so as to allow an early meeting of the team in charge of land response operations.

On land, the Prefect of the “Département” or his appointed representative directs pollution response operations. He is assisted by a team appointed by himself together with representatives of external departmental and regional services. He also has access to the resources of the local authorities and private resources obtained by agreement or requisitioned. Operations are directed from a permanent headquarters (Préfecture) and, if appropriate, from an advance post located in the most favourable situation.

### **13.2.2. Operational response**

The Maritime Prefect conducts response operations at sea with Navy and Government Resources, whose action he coordinates at sea. He may call upon resources available from the oil co-operatives possessing anti-pollution equipment (e.g. FOST, OSRL). He may request resources available within the context of bilateral agreements (Manche Plan Agreement with Great Britain, Biscay Plan with Spain) or regional agreements (Bonn Agreement Contracting Parties).

Pollution response operations on the coast are directed by decentralised State services. The Prefect of the “Département” may request the assistance of the national resources of the Sécurité Civile (Civil Emergency Services) and the Armed Forces. Moreover, he has access to the resources of the local authorities and all those available from government, in addition to private resources, whether by agreement or requisitioned.

### 13.2.3. Pollution response strategies at sea

The range of operational choices is both wide and restricted, each option being limited by many factors, the response time and the condition of the sea being the most important. These choices may be grouped by type of response:

- action at source or near source in order to stop the spill, lighten the vessel or barge, contain the spill at source and recover and disperse it at source;
- action on the high seas in order to contain the oil by booms and recover it with pumps and skimmers, trawl by booms/skimbers or surface trawls, and disperse it chemically;
- action near the coastline in order to protect sensitive areas of the coast, contain and skim and treat with dispersant in moderation under ecological supervision.

The use of dispersants is the subject of recommendations fixing the limits of the zones of use, in terms of the depth of water and the scale of the pollution (10, 100, 1,000 tonnes). The dispersants used are subject to prior approval from Cedre, which publishes a list of products approved in accordance with a procedure which takes account of both the effectiveness and the toxicity of the products.

### 13.2.4. Pollution response strategies on land

The priority of shoreline pollution response is to protect sensitive sites identified in the POLMAR-Land response plans. Shoreline clean-up is another priority in the NEBA (Net Environmental Benefit Analysis) concept which addresses environmental and economic issues. The recovery at sea of floating pollutants as well as the selective collection of pollutants washed up on the shore are other priorities.

### 13.2.5. Resources

- **Pollution response at sea**

In response to accidental pollution, the French Navy is guided by the Commission d'Etudes Pratiques de lutte antipollution (CEPPOL) (Commission for Practical Studies in Anti-Pollution Response) based in Brest, which advises the Chief of Staff of the French Navy.

Anti-pollution equipment for use at sea is stored in various storage and response centres along the three seaboard in Metropolitan France and those overseas. The main centres are Cherbourg, Le Havre (Channel/North Sea), Brest, Lorient (Atlantic) and Toulon (Mediterranean). In all, the equipment comprises over 11 km of booms, 54 skimmers, 64 pumps and 1,400 cubic metres of dispersants which can be made available for pollution response at sea.

- **Pollution response on land**

Apart from the ordinary resources held by all the authorities, 13 POLMAR (Land) storage and response centres are distributed over the whole of the French coastline (8 in Metropolitan France: Dunkirk, Le Havre, Brest, Saint Nazaire, Le Verdon, Sète, Marseilles, Ajaccio; 5 Overseas: Saint Pierre, Pointe à Pitre, Fort de France, Cayenne, Le Port). These centres store and maintain equipment necessary for the response to marine pollution. The centres are all managed by the Ministry for Equipment, Transport and Housing – Directorate for Sea Transport, Ports and the Coast (DTMPL).

- The Centre for Maritime and River Technical Studies (CETMEF) defines and acquires this equipment after trials in cooperation with the Centre de Documentation, de Recherche et d'Expérimentations sur les pollutions accidentelles des eaux (Cedre).
- Specialised maritime services or the maritime services of the Directorates for Equipment for the “Départements” (DDE) store and maintain this equipment on a local basis.

A few figures give an idea of the scale of the available resources: 33 km of booms, 140 pumps, 80 skimmers, 370 storage tanks.

These resources are placed at the disposal of the Prefects immediately the POLMAR Plan (Land) comes into operation. They may also be made available to the local authorities, under their responsibility and at their expense, by means of agreements and after approval by the Préfet of the “Département” concerned.

- **Other resources**

The authorities may also call upon other stocks of anti-pollution equipment available in the autonomous ports (Dunkirk, Le Havre, Rouen, Nantes/Saint Nazaire, Bordeaux, Marseilles), in certain emergency and firefighting centres and in private stores, especially those held by the private oil co-operative “Fast Oil Spill Team” (FOST) based in Marseilles.

Adding together the stocks available within the context of the POLMAR Plans (Sea) and (Land) and from other partners (ports, fire stations, the private co-operative), a total of about 55 km of booms, 172 skimmers, 241 pumps, 574 storage tanks (large and small), 426 items of beach cleaning equipment and about 1,500 cubic metres of dispersants are available to the authorities in the event of accidental pollution of the marine environment.

- **Preparation and exercises**

The success of the anti-pollution response plan of action depends on the quality of its preparation and implementation. It is therefore essential that the provisions made by the POLMAR Instruction should be tested and the personnel in charge of its implementation should be trained. The Land and Maritime Prefects accordingly organise simulation exercises at sea and on land in order to train both the senior members of the team and the persons responsible for the use of the equipment on land. Plans may be updated and improved through these exercises.

### 13.2.6 Specialised national resources

#### **Specialised response resources: Training units of the Civil Emergency Services**

Five response sections, with 30 men in each, have been formed within two Civil Emergency Services training units. These sections are independent, and are capable of very rapid response times. They are able to work without reinforcements for 48 hours in an anti-pollution response operation. Each section has its own pumping, collection and storage equipment, and its own means of transport and liaison.

- **French Customs Coastguard Service**

The customs authorities are responsible for deploying aircraft using remote sensing techniques to detect marine pollution. For this purpose, the French Customs Coastguard Service has at its disposal two aircraft with several types of remote sensing equipment which can be rapidly brought into service in the event of accidental marine pollution.

The role of these aircraft is to detect oil slicks, to contribute to the scientific assessment of the risk, to control the spread of the pollution, and to guide response equipment to the zone.

- **CEDRE**

Cedre (Centre for Documentation, Research and Experimentation on accidental water pollution) was formed by the French Government in order to improve pollution response technology and to inform the authorities responsible for pollution response regarding this technology.

Cedre may be consulted in cases of accidental pollution at sea, but has no powers to carry out the response operations. If the POLMAR Plan is put into action, Cedre places its resources and personnel at the disposal of the land and Maritime Prefects responsible for pollution response, in order to supply all the advice and assistance these authorities may require.

**13.2.7. Further information**

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- Other points of contact (on a 24-hour basis)

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