
UNITED KINGDOM

18. UK NATIONAL ORGANISATION

18.1 INFORMATION ON NATIONAL STRATEGIES, LEGISLATION, ORGANISATION, SHIPS, AIRCRAFT AND EQUIPMENT 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) Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

The MCA 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, an executive agency of the UK Department for Transport 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 Energy & Climate Change (DECC) works to make sure the UK has secure, clean, affordable energy supplies and promotes international action to mitigate climate change.

DECC, 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; advises local authorities on their contingency plans; approves plans for ports and harbours in accordance with OPRC and advises DECC 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 2014. The current NCP was effective as of August 2006.

18.1.3 ORGANISATION

Standing arrangements exist to channel reports to the MCA of incidents that cause, or threaten to cause pollution. 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 Head of Counter Pollution and Salvage Branch exercises overall control of counter pollution operations. MCA 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 in line with the UK Civil Contingencies mechanism, may be established at the request of the affected 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 to apply dispersants 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.

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 an Emergency Towing Vessel (ETV) at the Orkney Islands, Scotland.

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>.