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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents

#### Sixth meeting

The Hague, 8–10 November 2010

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

#### United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Industrial Accident Notification System

### Report of the fourth consultation for points of contact

#### Introduction

1. The fourth consultation for points of contact for the purpose of accident notification and mutual assistance designated within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Industrial Accident Notification (IAN) System was held on 25 and 26 March 2010 in Zagreb, Croatia. It was organized by the National Protection and Rescue Directorate and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia.
2. The consultation was held under the auspices of UNECE within the framework of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. The activity was mandated in the workplan for 2009–2010 under the Convention (ECE/CP.TEIA/19, Annex I) in order to discuss the results of the tests and exercises performed and allow for the further review the effectiveness of the IAN System. The points of contact were also requested to analyse the compatibility between the IAN System and the European Union (EU) Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) to verify that there was no redundancy between them (ECE/CP.TEIA/19, para. 67).

#### I. Objectives

3. The key objectives of the fourth consultation were to provide a forum for:
  - (a) Reviewing the effectiveness of the UNECE IAN System on the basis of the communication tests and the analytical exercises conducted before the end of 2009;
  - (b) Discussing the effective use of the IAN System alongside other available notification systems; and

(c) Sharing experience and good practices in the organization of national rescue and civil protection directorates.

## **II. Participation and chairs**

4. The consultation was attended by representatives of points of contact from the following 23 UNECE member countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Representatives of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the European Commission Joint Research Centre (EC JRC) also attended the consultation.

5. The consultation was chaired by Mr. Nenad Mikulic, Director of the Directorate for Environmental Assessment and Industrial Pollution of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia on the first day, and by Mr. Robert Mikac, Head of National Centre 112 of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate of Croatia on the second day.<sup>1</sup>

## **III. Opening of the consultation**

6. Mr. D. Trut, Director of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, opened the fourth consultation on behalf of the host country.

7. A representative of the secretariat to the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents welcomed participants on behalf of UNECE and thanked the National Protection and Rescue Directorate and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia for hosting the fourth consultation. He then provided a brief overview regarding the developments relating to the IAN System, in particular since the third consultation, and highlighted the decisions on the System taken at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties and the related follow-up by the Bureau and a task force.

## **IV. Programme**

8. The consultation consisted of three sessions. Session I was devoted to discussion on how to further strengthen the effectiveness of the UNECE IAN System, taking into account the results of the communication tests and analytical exercises undertaken. The statistics from the communication tests were presented by the secretariat. The results of the analytical exercises were presented, respectively, by Croatia, for the exercise between Croatia and Slovenia; by Switzerland, for the exercise in Switzerland with notification to Germany and France; and by Serbia, for the exercise between Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bureau requested the secretariat at its January 2009 meeting to establish a task force on IAN to prepare for the consultation, especially to prepare the discussion on the compatibility between the IAN and the CECIS systems. The task force held two meetings, on 17 September 2009 and on 14 January 2010. The minutes of those meetings are available on the Convention website at: <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/pointsofcontact.html>.

10. Also in session I, a representative of International Safety Research Inc. Europe made a presentation on sharing good practice in the conduct of exercises with a view to a critical revision of contingency plans.

11. In session II, points of contact discussed the effective use of the IAN System alongside systems existing under other international agreements and used for notification of different emergencies, including the EU CECIS system. Presentations providing background for the discussions were made by Austria, giving an overview of country obligations for using notification systems in an event of an emergency situation with possible transboundary effects; by EU JRC, on the network concept for data exchange and format elaborated in the scope of nuclear and radiological incidents; and by the Netherlands, showing the benefits of standardization in data format for use in electronic applications for notification.

12. Session III focused on the sharing of experience and good practices in the organization of national protection or rescue directorates. Presentations were made by representatives of Croatia and France.

(The programme for the fourth consultation and the presentations are available on the Convention website at <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/pointsofcontact.html>.)

## V. Effectiveness of the IAN System: outcome of the tests and exercises and conclusions

13. In the period between the third and the fourth consultation, 20 communication tests and 3 exercises had been performed.

14. The communication tests showed that there were still points of contact that had not acknowledged the receipt of notification reports, despite the fact that the acknowledgment was done automatically when opening the relevant notification reports in the Web-based application. In some cases it was found that the lack of acknowledgement was connected to problems with using the IAN System accounts.

15. The countries involved in the exercise shared the following conclusions and lessons learned from their respective analytical (Croatia with Slovenia) or field exercises (Switzerland with Germany and France, Serbia with Bulgaria and Romania):<sup>2</sup>

(a) Technical means like electronic applications were important for exchange of information, and at the same time telephone lines needed to be available for back-up (Swiss exercise);

(b) Exercises, whether analytical or in the field, had shown that cross-border notification was very difficult due to:

(i) A lack of clear criteria for decision-making on notification (Swiss exercise);

(ii) A lack of quality data from the field for inclusion in the notification reports (all three exercises);

(iii) Difficulties related to the need to translate notification messages into English (all three exercises);

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<sup>2</sup> The field exercise between Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia was conducted as part of an Assistance Programme project on joint management of transboundary emergencies from spills of hazardous substances into the Danube River

(c) Regular notification exercises needed to be held, as each exercise revealed new gaps and shortcomings and there was also a need to test adjustments made following previous exercises (all three exercises);

(d) Local authorities should be encouraged to think internationally, by incorporating international notification procedures in all full-scale exercises conducted at the local level (Swiss exercise);

(e) Exercises needed to be conducted in accordance with more realistic scenarios, including dealing with a flood of requests for information from other countries likely to be affected and pressure from the media, which would add an additional stress factor and could reveal further gaps in the system (Swiss exercise);

(f) While the IAN System Web-based application had been found to be user-friendly, at the same time it was suggested that it could be improved by:

(i) Allowing for greater flexibility in filling in and updating or changing information on chemical substances. Also the field for entering the substance name/formula was too small (Croatian exercise);

(ii) Introducing a fourth report/form to the notification system, for offers of assistance, allowing the country requesting assistance to keep a record of such offers (Croatian exercise); and

(iii) Adding a feature that would allow for sending shorter messages requesting additional information or providing brief preliminary notifications before the full extent of an accident was known, without the need to complete the full report (Croatian exercise).

16. The lead countries for the exercises also formulated actions to be undertaken, both at the country and the international level, which had been flagged for discussion at the consultation:

(a) *Country level:*

(i) Raise awareness at the local level on the obligation to provide reliable international notification and involve staff of points of contact in preparing drill scenarios;

(ii) Introduce regular testing/exercises between neighbouring countries, involving staff other than the points of contact (e.g., response teams);

(iii) Maintain good knowledge of structure, means and procedure for response to emergencies;

(b) *International level:*

(i) Provide a commonly agreed tests and exercises plan;

(ii) Address the issue of avoiding duplication and inconsistencies in notification if a number of notification systems were in use;

(iii) Make changes to the IAN System to increase its user-friendly operation.

17. A discussion then ensued between the representatives of the points of contact, during which the following suggestions were made:

(a) Tests and exercises should be performed between neighbouring countries or within catchment areas of rivers;

(b) Exercises including mutual assistance should be performed UNECE-wide;

(c) Notification systems in transboundary contexts, and equally for testing, should be used as follows:

- (i) For waterway scenarios notification should be made by more dedicated systems (e.g., early warning systems of international river commissions), if existing, whereas IAN should be used in cases where there was a lack of more dedicated systems and for mutual assistance requests; and
- (ii) For airway scenarios IAN should be used;
- (d) Ideally, there should be one system for all notifications. Since that was regarded as impossible to achieve, standardization between systems should be considered;
- (e) The IAN System should allow for a reply function, especially to request assistance; and
- (f) Modifications to the IAN System should be only recommended once exercises and tests were conducted by more points of contact so that recommended changes reflected the needs of the majority.

18. Based on the discussion and the suggestions made, the representatives of points of contact agreed that:

- (a) Points of contact who did not comply with notification procedures under the IAN System should be urged to do so;
- (b) Points of contact who faced problems with using the IAN Web-based application should contact the secretariat for immediate assistance to rectify the situation without delay;
- (c) Tests and exercises using the IAN System should be performed on three levels:

Level 1: **Communication tests** should be performed only between neighbouring countries with a frequency of one to two tests yearly initiated by each point of contact to all the points of contact of neighbouring countries;

Level 2: **Analytical exercises**, comprising also tabletop or full-scale drills, should be performed between neighbouring countries once every two years with at least one of the neighbouring countries. Points of contact should agree bilaterally on the conduct of the exercises and inform the secretariat on the planning;

Level 3: One **full scale exercise**, with a review of the provision and receipt of mutual assistance, should be held biennially by points of contact; countries with economies in transition were encouraged to organize the exercise themselves with supported from other countries;

- (d) Recommendations for any modifications to the IAN System and its Web-based application should be made only after a considerably higher number of tests and especially analytical exercises were carried out;
- (e) The secretariat should collect the suggestions for modifications to the IAN System for consideration at the next consultation of points of contact and for possible submission to the subsequent meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

## VI. **Effective use of the IAN System alongside other notification systems: outcome of the presentations and conclusions**

19. The introductory presentations on the effective use of IAN System alongside other notification systems highlighted the following issues:

- (a) UNECE member countries have been operating various notification systems for chemical emergencies in accordance with various agreements, among them IAN, CECIS and the warning system of the International River Commissions;

(b) Each existing notification system was best adapted for its particular purpose; at the same time, there were emergency situations which required the application of more than one system;

(c) While a lower number of systems could be more efficient and more user-friendly, the various systems had been providing back-up for each other;

(d) During emergencies there was always only a short time in which to decide what information to send via which system;

(e) Under the real stress of emergency situations, manuals were of little help in guiding the choice of which notification system to use;

(f) The establishment of standards to be applied across different systems for notification of chemical emergencies could present a solution, where well-defined sets of data elements could be exchanged between systems. Such standardization had been introduced in the notification of radiological emergencies with International Radiation Information eXchange (IRIX) as a standard characterized by a well defined set of data elements that could be exchanged (machine to machine) using an XML (eXtensible Markup Language) schema through a Web-service.

20. The representatives of points of contact acknowledged in the discussion the issues presented. They agreed that there were too many notification systems, but that, at the same time, all of them provided an essential function. For that reason, the proposal to apply standardization across various notification systems was commonly appreciated and supported and especially that standardization:

(a) Was not to replace any of the systems but to allow communication between them;

(b) Would facilitate the job for points of contact when sending notification;

(c) Would require one training on the standard instead of separate trainings for each system; and

(d) Would reduce the possibility of making mistakes.

21. The points of contact agreed to submit a recommendation to the Conference of the Parties that a standard characterized by a well defined set of data elements that could be exchanged machine to machine should be elaborated and subsequently introduced under the IAN System.

22. The elaboration of the standard should be done in cooperation with international bodies hosting other notification systems for chemical emergencies.

23. Points of contact requested the secretariat to contact international bodies hosting other notification systems to solicit their interest in elaborating a common standard for notification of chemical emergencies, and subsequently to inform the Conference of the Parties on the responses of those bodies vis-à-vis the standardization proposal.

24. The points of contact also recommended that the Conference of the Parties consider establishing a working group to jointly elaborate the standards for chemical emergencies. That working group should be comprised of representatives in charge of different notification systems.

## **VII. Sharing of experience and good practice**

25. Croatia and France presented good practices and the national systems used in everyday work by the respective rescue and civil defence authorities.

## **VIII. Closing**

26. The Chair welcomed the elaboration of important agreements related to further tests and exercises with IAN System. He also noted with appreciation the recommendation to elaborate a common standard for notification of chemical emergencies, before officially closing the session.

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