
Economic Commission for Europe

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

Bureau

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Seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Report of the Bureau

Results of electronic consultation of the points of contact

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents provides in its article 10 for industrial accident notification (IAN) systems. Paragraph 1 of article 10 specifies that “The Parties shall, with the aim of obtaining and transmitting industrial accident notifications containing information needed to counteract transboundary effects, provide for the establishment and operation of compatible and efficient industrial accident notification systems at appropriate levels”. Consequently, the Convention’s IAN System has been established accessible through the website of the Convention.

2. Article 17 of the Convention requires the designation or establishment by each Party of a point of contact for the purpose of industrial accident notifications pursuant to Article 10, the informing within three months of the entry into force of other Parties through the secretariat of which body it has designated and, within one month of the date of decision, the informing of the other Parties through the secretariat of any changes regarding the designation. In addition, article 17 requires that each Party shall keep its point of contact and industrial accident notification systems pursuant to Article 10 operational at all times.

3. The Conference of the Parties, at its sixth meeting: (a) acknowledged the efforts of the points of contact aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)] IAN System, and of notification in general; (b) requested the points of contact to perform the recommended testing and exercises, and to discuss their results at the next consultation; and (c) invited the points of contact to report on their work at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties. (ECE/CP.TEIA/22, para. 47).

4. At their joint meeting held from 29 February to 1 March 2012, the Convention’s Bureau and the Working Group on Implementation requested the secretariat to invite representatives of the points of contact to hold an electronic consultation to brainstorm on the future of the System and formulate recommendations in this regard for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties (informal report COPB43/COPWGI34, para. 44).

5. The secretariat issued a brief questionnaire to the points of contact. At the same time, the secretariat announced that a communications test would be made on 11 June 2012 and this was duly carried out.

6. This note sets out the responses to the questionnaire and the results of the communications test, as well as proposing actions to strengthen the mechanism of notification.

I. Questionnaire

7. A series of 12 questions was sent to the points of contact on 23 May 2012. As the list of points of contact is brief, the questionnaire was copied to focal points and other contacts in the ECE countries. The accompanying message asked for replies by 8 June 2012. The message also asked that points of contact at least respond to confirm receipt of the message. The sending of the message revealed a number of gaps in the list of points of contact (see part II below) and in the contacts of the list of national focal points.

8. The following 16 Parties responded to the questionnaire between 28 May and 13 June 2012: Albania; Austria; Estonia; France; Germany; Italy; Lithuania; Poland; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Russian Federation; Serbia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Sweden; and Switzerland. In addition, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland responded to the message but only to provide an acknowledgement of receipt of the message.

9. Georgia, which is not a Party, also responded to the questionnaire.

10. The responses of the 17 respondents to the questionnaire are summarized in the remainder of this part of the note.

1. Do you regularly check that the national contact details in the IAN System are up to date? When did you last access the IAN System, and for which purpose?

11. Nine of the seventeen respondents indicated that they did check the contact details regularly, four that they did not. One of the positive respondent wrote that updates were done through biennial implementation reports and when prompted by secretariat

12. One respondent indicated having accessed the System for an exercise in 2012, two others in 2010 and one in 2005.

2. In the past two years has your country been in a situation for which the System would have been needed? If so and your organization did not use the System, please would you indicate why?

13. Fifteen respondents indicated that their country had not been in such a situation. One indicated that it had, having faced a dangerous goods accident near another State. In the end, it had not been necessary to use the System as all effects were contained in the country, and because dangerous good accidents are not covered by the System or the Convention.

3. Have you carried out an exercise with the System, or are you planning to do so soon? Please indicate the exercise date.

14. Apart from communications test by the secretariat on 11 June 2012, eight respondents indicated no exercise whereas two reported that they had carried out an exercise in 2012 (one not in a leading role), one in 2011, one in 2010, three in 2009 and one in 2005.

4. Did you receive an early-warning or assistance request report in 2011 or 2012? If so, please indicate the date or dates of receipt.

15. Fifteen respondents had not received such an early-warning or assistance request report in 2011 or 2012, three mentioned receipt of exercise reports and one indicated that the last early warning was in 2010.

5. Please identify any difficulties with using the IAN System.

16. Respondents identified a range of difficulties with using the System, some of which related to lack of use or opportunity to use:

(a) There are no opportunities to use the System, because of a lack of accidents. In the Nordic region, very few hazardous activities are subject to the Convention;

(b) There is insufficient practice in using the System. Exercise mode messages should be sent two or three times per year on pre-determined dates. A guide to exercises is needed;

(c) Training is needed, including for sending and receiving messages and in deciding on follow-up actions.

17. Some respondents identified technical limitations in the System:

(a) The System does not operate using a secure protocol (https);

(b) Print and convert to PDF options are needed, as well as the possibility to add attachments to messages;

(c) Wind speed should be in km/h instead of m/s;

(d) One user's username and password were not recognized;

(e) A button to confirm receipt of a message is needed;

(f) A directory of points of contact (telephone numbers, email and postal addresses) is needed for each exercise.

18. Finally, some respondents identified broader difficulties:

(a) Inconsistent standards, units and procedures between countries;

(b) Information may be duplicated in other systems;

(c) Inadequate English language skills;

(d) Diversity of computer equipment.

6. Do you rely on another system for early warning of industrial accidents? If so, please indicate the system or systems used.

19. Respondents identified numerous other systems for early warning:

(a) River Rhine river alarm system;

(b) ICPDR Accident Emergency Warning System (AEWS), Principal International Alert Centres (PIAC);

(c) Commonwealth of Independent States, Interstate Council for emergency situations of natural and man-made disasters;

(d) European Union (EU) Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS), Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC);

(e) OCHA Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS);

(f) OCHA Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (Virtual OSOCC);

- (g) NATO Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC);
- (h) EU Rapid Alert System Biological and Chemical Attack (RAS-BICHAT);
- (i) Early Warning System within the International Commission on the Protection of the Oder against Pollution (ICPO);
- (j) EU ECURIE (nuclear accident);
- (k) IAEA.

20. In addition, GUAM member States are planning a new system and there are various national systems.

7. Do local authorities in your country have the possibility of using another notification system to notify directly to authorities of neighbouring countries that an accident with potential transboundary consequences has happened?

21. Eight respondents indicated that there was not a possibility for local authorities to use another system.

22. Several respondents referred to bilateral or multilateral agreements. For example, Poland has signed intergovernmental agreements with the neighbouring countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine) on cooperation and mutual assistance in case of catastrophes, natural disasters and other major accidents. Moreover, with some neighbouring countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania), there had been elaborated technical instructions for the fire services taking part in mutual assistance.

23. Three respondents noted use of telephone, fax, electronic mail or radio communication that, though not systems as such, were important.

24. Others indicated that communications with neighbouring countries could take place at different levels: local emergency services might directly notify counterparts across the border; national civil protection authority can notify counterpart across border; or, for EU member States, national civil protection authority can notify via EU-MIC (CECIS). For others though, unless there were specific agreements, notification of authorities in neighbouring countries had to pass through a national focal point and diplomatic channels.

8. How is the cooperation between central and local level in your country organized on issues related to preparedness and response? For example, does the elaboration of off-site contingency plans follow a harmonized structure in the country or is it left to the judgement of the local competent authorities?

25. Eight of the seventeen respondents indicated harmonized contingency plans from local to central level, while three others indicated at least a consistent structure for such plans. One indicated that the systems were centralized. Some EU member States referred to Emergency Management Plans (EMPs) and External Emergency Plans (EEPs) in accordance with the Seveso Directive. However, one Party indicated that the drawing up of off-site contingency plans was mainly the responsibility of local authorities.

26. One respondent explained that, for response, the local level rescue leader normally coordinated and collaborated with emergency authorities on regional and national level before taking decisions if an accident extended beyond the local level.

27. In addition, one respondent noted the lack of national coherence concerning the use of harmonized accident scenarios

9. Is training of personnel adequate in the emergency centres operating the IAN System? What could be done to improve the situation, for example at the legislative or organizational level?

28. Nine respondents indicated that training is adequate. However, eight (sometimes the same respondents) indicated that exercises, or training (possibly on-line), using the IAN System was needed or could be useful, particularly given the rarity of the System's use. One Party suggested the exchange of experts.

10. What emerging issues in the areas of competence of your organization you would like to be discussed, for example in a consultation of the Points of Contact?

29. Three respondents indicated that there were not any emerging issues, whereas three others confirmed that a regional meeting of the points of contact was necessary.

30. Respondents suggested the following topics to be discussed:

(a) An exchange of experience between countries in relation to the IAN System and other systems (2 respondents);

(b) The management of the different warning, alarm and notification systems that are in use, in order to create links and synergies between them and not to operate them separately (3 respondents). One emphasized the need for one global early warning system;

(c) Necessary improvements of the IAN System's reliability and security, and its update (2 respondents);

(d) The interface between ECE and WHO, regarding International Health Regulations (1 respondent);

(e) Integrated risk modelling and multi-risk mapping, as EU was developing increasing numbers of legislative documents that were based on quantitative assessment. How would this influence the classical emergency response field? (1 respondent).

11. What would you see as a major threat in your area of competence at present?

31. Four respondents did not see a major threat. Others identified a variety of such threats:

(a) Inadequate recognition of the potential threat posed by a major accident, or a lack of awareness of the importance of the tasks assigned by international and bilateral agreements;

(b) The management of multiple systems;

(c) An imbalance between States in their capacity to prevent and respond to industrial accidents;

(d) The loss of qualified personnel in the field of civil protection;

(e) Inadequate English language skills;

(f) Inadequate computer systems;

(g) A lack of practice in major accident notification.

12. What should be the future of IAN System? Should it be downgraded? Or should it be upgraded to fit better the needs for improving or maintaining the countries' capacity for proper notification and, if so, how?

32. Over five respondents indicated that the System was adequate and should continue as it is, with one emphasizing the importance of keeping it simple.

33. Two respondents suggested that it be integrated into or merged with other international alerting and operational communications systems, especially the EU CECIS, whereas one other suggested that it be extended to address other emergency situations. Another EU member State recognized that not all ECE member States have access to other systems.

34. One respondent suggested that the IAN System be closed down as it was a dedicated system for a rare single kind of accident that led to extra administration and therefore did not contribute to good value for its citizens; other mechanisms should be used. Another country suggested that the System's future should be discussed.

35. One responded that the System should be improved, another that its security and reliability needed to be increased, yet another that common data definitions with other systems were needed.

36. Finally, three respondents suggested that more frequent use and testing were needed, with more sophisticated exercises – not just speed of response but also testing of filling forms – and one even suggesting that the System might be used as a more general communication tool, for example for disseminating information about industrial accidents in general.

II. Communication exercise

37. The IAN System was used in its exercise mode to carry out a communications test by sending an early-warning report on 11 June 2012 at 07:17 UTC. The communications test had been announced in advance in the message accompanying the questionnaire (see part I above). All points of contact were selected to receive the message, but the System did not offer the possibility to select the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit and the EU ECHO-MIC.

38. The IAN System sends out a message by email asking points of contact to access the System for more information; the message made clear that this was an exercise, which may have resulted in some points of contact deciding not to access the System, but this cannot be confirmed. The System records the time at which the report was accessed by each point of contact; no information was presented by the System regarding the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit and the EU ECHO-MIC, so it was not possible to determine whether they were sent the message, received the message or accessed the report.

39. The following 31 Parties were identified in the IAN System: Armenia; Austria; Belarus (not an official email address); Belgium; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; the Czech Republic; Estonia; France; Germany; Hungary; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Monaco; the Netherlands (two contacts); Norway; Poland; Portugal; the Republic of Moldova (two contacts); Romania; the Russian Federation; Serbia (individual email address, not a body); Slovakia (two contacts, but second was an individual); Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; and the United Kingdom.

40. **Eight Parties did not access the System:** Armenia, Estonia, Hungary (contact email address not functioning), Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway and Portugal. The reaction times of those Parties that did access the System are listed in Table 1.

41. Three States that are not Parties to the Convention were in the IAN System: Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine. However, of these only Turkey reacted, and that was approximately 27 hours later.

42. **Eight Parties to the Convention were not identified in the IAN System:** Albania; Azerbaijan; Denmark; Finland; Greece; Kazakhstan; Montenegro; and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

43. The System provides a list of public reports for all users. There were no listed operational mode reports since the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. However, there were the exercises listed in Table 2. The communication exercise described in this note corresponds to the report with serial number XXX 7/1 FINAL.

44. Prior to undertaking the communications exercise, several outstanding requests for new users of the IAN System, i.e. new points of contact, were processed. Unfortunately this had to be done manually as it was no longer possible to access the IAN System as administrator, this being the normal method to undertake such maintenance tasks. It would appear that such access had not been possible since autumn 2011 when the ECE website was migrated to a new server. Other maintenance tasks may also need to be done. The programmer who developed the current version of the IAN System was contacted but was not able and willing to resolve the problem. ECE's own information services unit appears unable to resolve the problem.

Table 1.
Reaction times by Parties (minutes)

<i>Party</i>	<i>Minutes to react</i>
Austria	22
Belarus	13
Belgium	74
Bulgaria	315
Croatia	6
Cyprus	77
Czech Republic	5
France	21
Germany	17
Latvia	120
Lithuania	21
Netherlands	4
Poland	15
Republic of Moldova	6
Romania	154
Russian Federation	61
Serbia	40
Slovakia	17
Slovenia	27
Spain	23
Sweden	8
Switzerland	6
United Kingdom	78

Table 2.

Public reports in exercise mode since the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in November 2010.

<i>Serial Number</i>	<i>Report Type</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Received (mm/dd/yyyy, UTC)</i>
SRB 5/1 FINAL	Early-warning	PUBLIC	06/11/2012 08:06
XXX 7/1 FINAL	Early-warning	PUBLIC	06/11/2012 07:17
BLR 9/1	Assistance Request	PUBLIC	05/31/2012 08:14
BLR 8/1	Early-warning	PUBLIC	05/29/2012 08:27
CHE 4/5 FINAL	Information Report	PUBLIC	05/10/2012 10:09
CHE 4/4	Information Report	PUBLIC	05/10/2012 05:59
CHE 4/3	Information Report	PUBLIC	05/09/2012 12:09
CHE 4/2	Information Report	PUBLIC	05/08/2012 14:44
CHE 4/1	Early-warning	PUBLIC	05/08/2012 06:55
CHE 3/1	Early-warning	PUBLIC	03/29/2012 08:52

III. Possible actions to strengthen the mechanism of notification

45. The following actions might be undertaken to strengthen the IAN System:

(a) The Bureau or the secretariat could contact each Party to insist on the respect of the obligation to identify a body to act as points of contact, and to provide official contact details of the body that is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week;

(b) The secretariat could repeat the communications exercise at the weekend or at night, without announcing the exact date. Exercises could be repeated periodically;

(c) The content of this note could be presented to the Conference of the Parties, as an official document, an informal document or as a presentation;

(d) The IAN System could be repaired to provide administrator access, but this may require funding of a consultant;

(e) Inadequacies in the IAN System could be corrected, but this would require funding of a consultant. The consultant could, for example, ensure that a secure communications protocol is used and that reports indicate whether institutional points of contact have received notifications sent;

(f) The IAN System could be upgraded in line with proposals made in the replies to the questionnaire. This would require funding of a consultant;

(g) Alternatively, the IAN System could be abandoned and a means found to implement article 10 of the Convention through another mechanism;

(h) A meeting of the points of contact could be held, for which funding would be required.