

# **Summary report of the seventh online consultation for the Points of Contact of the UNECE Industrial Accidents Notification System, 15 February 2016**

## **Introduction**

The Conference of the Parties of the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) at its eighth meeting (Geneva, 3–5 December 2014) requested the secretariat and the Points of Contact to the Industrial Accident Notification System (IAN system) to perform tests and exercises, to discuss the results at their next consultation (either electronically or in person) and to report to the Conference of the Parties at its ninth meeting.

The participants in the sixth online consultation of the Points of Contact (October/November 2014) recommended that the test of the IAN System should be announced in advance in order to check the connectivity of the System. With regard to the request of the Conference of the Parties and the recommendations of the Points of Contact, the secretariat of the Industrial Accidents Convention performed an announced connectivity test of the IAN System on 15 January 2016.

After the connectivity test, the secretariat processed its results and organized an online consultation for the Points of Contact to the IAN system. The online consultation was held by the means of WEBEX internet teleconference on 15 February.

## **Agenda, participation and presentations**

The online consultation was opened to all Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention and non-Parties in the UNECE region.

The consultation was attended by representatives of Albania, Azerbaijan, Italy, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Switzerland, the Emergency Response and Coordination Centre (ERCC) of the European Union as well as the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine.

The online consultation was opened by the secretariat which welcomed the participants and outlined the goal of the meeting, focusing on the need to discuss the linkages with other early warning notification and mutual assistance systems, taking account of the conclusions and recommendations of previous meetings of the Points of Contacts, with regard to the information exchange between and standardization across various systems.

The secretariat then gave a short overview of the main functionalities of the IAN System and presented the results of the connectivity test, performed on 15 January 2016.

The main test results were:

- The exercise accident report was sent to 51 respondents from 44 UNECE member states and international organizations
- The test yielded the following results:
  - o There were 29 responses acknowledging the receipt of the accident report
  - o 25 of the responses were within the recommended time limit (1 hour)
  - o There were responses from 25 Parties, one committed country under the Assistance Programme (Georgia) and one international organization (UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit)
  - o The response rate is corresponding to the response rates from previous exercises
  - o The response times are significantly better than for previous exercises
  - o There were lots of outdated contacts and problem with logging on to the IAN System.

Ms Svetlana Stirbu, national focal point of the Republic of Moldova, shared the experience gained and the lessons learned from the tests of the IAN System during the UNECE Danube Delta Project, implemented under the Industrial Accidents Convention. Under the Project, both the IAN system and the Accident Emergency Warning System (AEWS) operated under the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River with its Principle International Alert Centres (PIACs) were tested through a table-top exercise.

Ms. Stirbu highlighted several problems related to the operation of the IAN System during the Project, such as problems with the interface of the online application (e.g., problems defining wind direction) and the availability of trained personnel on national level. She also suggested some possible improvements, such as expanding the systems functionality with option to send SMS messages to the Points of Contact, increasing the number of national contacts, streamlining and simplifying notification reports, etc. She also mentioned that the AEWS PIACs offered the functionality to have multiple contacts for a single Point of Contact, compared to the IAN system, and suggested such an improvement.

Mr Cristian Iacob, representing the European Commission, Directorate General Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) provided insight into the background, legal foundations and functionalities of the European Response Coordination Centre, highlighting the capacity of the Centre, the tools and resources available and the possibilities for outreach to and cooperation with partners and stakeholders. He highlighted that the ERCC was accessible to all countries, which could request assistance from participating states in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (ERCC) or from the European Commission itself for any type of accident. Memoranda of Understanding between the EU ERCC, the Russian Federation (Ministry of Emergency Situations EMERCOM), ASEAN and other regions existed. Mr. Iacob stressed the active requests for assistance by countries as a prerequisite for delivering that assistance through the ERCC.

## Discussion

The participants discussed the test results and the linkages to other early warning, notification and mutual assistance systems, in particular the ERCC and existing alarm systems within international river commissions. They highlighted the complementarities between different systems, based on the difference of their scope, triggering criteria and purposes. The ERCC was much larger in its scope, covering all types of accidents, including chemical accidents falling under the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention, and providing for the possibility to request assistance not only from other countries, but also from the EU itself. The systems of the international river commissions were more dedicated to the needs of accident notification among riparian countries, with points of contacts at the local, whereas there was mostly one national point of contact for the IAN system. At their fourth meeting, the Points of Contacts had considered that

- For water-path scenarios, the early warning systems of the international river commissions should be used, if existing, whereas IAN should be used in cases of absence of more dedicated systems and for mutual assistance requests;
- For air-path scenarios, IAN should be used.

The consultation discussed the importance of testing the IAN, as well as other systems, if possible simultaneously, including through different projects comprising table-top, in addition to field exercises.

The importance of coordination and networking was stressed - on a national level, as well as with neighbouring countries, countries within international river basins and international organizations, to ensure that points of contacts are mutual aware of their nomination and the purposes and functionalities of the different systems. Topics of discussion also touched upon the training of the Points of Contact, incl. dissemination of training materials, raising the awareness of the countries for the opportunities that the IAN System offers with regard to emergency response and mutual assistance.

## Conclusions

The main conclusions of the online consultation were:

### **A. With regard to the IAN System connectivity test:**

- While the response rate to the connectivity test corresponded to the response rates from previous exercises, there was room for improvement, bearing in mind that the connectivity test was announced in advance.
- Points of contacts are encouraged to participate in such connectivity tests
- Points of contacts are encouraged to maintain their contact details up to date, to notify the secretariat ([ian@unece.org](mailto:ian@unece.org)) of any changes and to nominate 24/7 points of contact

- there is need of additional training of the Points of contact in order to ensure full operability of the IAN System

**B. With regard to the test of the IAN System conducted in the framework of the Danube Delta Project, and the coordination with other notification and mutual assistance systems, the Points of Contacts:**

- possible improvements of the IAN System should be further considered
- the available training and information materials on the IAN system, notably the information and instructions prepared by the secretariat, should be actively disseminated
- there is need for enhanced coordination and networking on national level, but also with neighbouring countries, countries sharing international river basins and international organizations
- there is need for continuous exercises on the bilateral and multilateral level.
- Countries are encouraged to test the IAN system, as well as possibly the ERCC and the early warning systems of international river commissions, jointly, in the framework of table-top exercises, including through EU-funded or other bi- or multilateral projects
- A future consultation of the points of contacts could be carried out jointly with a consultation of the points of contacts nominated under the ERCC for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism participating countries, in order to take advantage of the fact that Points of Contacts for the EU were largely the same and to further consider possible synergies. This possibility should be further explored, in cooperation with the European Commission, DG ECHO, for the 2017-18 workplan of the Industrial Accidents Convention.