

Conclusions of the Seminar on accidental transboundary water pollution prevention – contingency planning, early warning, mitigation

– Budapest, Hungary, 4-5 November 2019 –

Main objectives

- Exchange experiences and challenges in (national and transboundary) contingency planning, accidental transboundary water pollution prevention, and early warning systems
- Share good practices and challenges in the application of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Checklist for contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters (herein referred to as “the Checklist”)
- Promote good practices, tools and lessons learned from international river basin commissions in preventing transboundary water pollution
- Strengthen participation of UNECE countries in the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG), and enhance cooperation with the international river basin commissions

Attendees and organizers

The seminar brought together 31 experts in contingency planning and early warning from across the UNECE region, including representatives of international river commissions¹, national governments², private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to discuss good practices and challenges in transboundary contingency planning and preventing accidental water pollution. The seminar was co-organized by Hungary and UNECE within the framework of the Industrial Accidents Convention³ and the Water Convention⁴, and with the support of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the JEG. It was hosted by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior and supported financially by Germany.

The seminar was comprised of three sessions, each followed by a wrap-up by the Co-Chairs. Sessions I and II provided an opportunity for the national representatives and NGOs to share their experiences in national and transboundary contingency planning, accidental transboundary water pollution prevention, early warning systems, and the application of the UNECE Checklist for contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters. The Checklist was developed in 2016 by the JEG⁵, a joint group under the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention and the Water Convention. Session III provided an opportunity to for international river basin commissions to share their good practices, tools and challenges in preventing transboundary water pollution. The workshop concluded with a summary of the key points and findings that were revealed through the presentations and discussions.

¹ International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River; International Commission for the Protection of the Odra River; International Sava River Basin Commission; International Scheldt Commission; and the Dniester Commission

² Belarus, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, and the Republic of North Macedonia

³ Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents: <http://www.unece.org/env/teia.html>

⁴ Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes: <https://www.unece.org/env/water/>

⁵ For further information about the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, including how to provide support to the Group, refer to its [webpage](#) and the [Brochure on the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents](#)

The seminar was held with a back-to-back with a 19th meeting of the JEG (Budapest, 5 September 2019, in the afternoon). Representatives of international river basin commissions joined the meeting, to discuss possibilities for further cooperation with the UNECE Industrial Accident Convention, in particular with the JEG.

The key outcomes of the seminar are presented below.

1. Key conclusions of Sessions I and II

- The UNECE Checklist for contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters provides a systematic approach to assess the risks of transboundary pollution and helps to ensure effective and efficient contingency planning, including in a transboundary context.
- In using the Checklist (e.g. by integrating it into national legislation or using it for training and educational purposes), countries can work towards fulfilling their obligations under the UNECE Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably Sustainable Development Goal 6 on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.
- The Checklist has been applied by some UNECE countries (notably Armenia and Georgia through a joint exercise) and supported, among others, the development of a joint contingency plan for the Danube Delta between the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.
- The representative of Eco Peace (Armenia) provided comments on the Checklist following the joint exercise between Armenia and Georgia and provided recommendations (including editorial and the inclusion of additional questions) for its possible improvement in the future. The Republic of Moldova expressed the importance of continuing the Project on Hazard and Crisis Management in the Danube Delta, and called for nominations from countries to provide funding for this project. A future project may provide for a further opportunity to strengthen contingency planning and improve the application of the checklist in a transboundary context.
- The presentations by the representatives of Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Serbia in Session II demonstrated that the national approaches to contingency planning, early warning, alarm, alert, thresholds and notification systems, organizational/governance structures and the financial mechanisms for managing and responding to accidental water pollution differ from country to country.
- Despite well-established national legislation on accidental water pollution, countries face challenges in contingency planning in a transboundary context. While the abovementioned countries shared good practices in cooperation with neighbouring countries (e.g. information sharing, joint exercises, bilateral agreements on protection and rescue, etc), the discussions revealed that there are logical and communication barriers to implementing joint or harmonized contingency plans, as well as difficulties with international warning/alert systems and in integrating the response actors. Furthermore, responsibilities for contingency planning are fragmented between different ministries and bodies at the national, regional and international levels, depending the level of responsibility regarding the internal or external Plan for intervention in case of accidents at the concerned industrial units.
- Countries are attempting to harmonize their contingency plans with neighbouring and riparian countries, but expressed the need for further joint trainings and exercises in this field.

2. Key conclusions of Session III

- River basin commissions provide important platforms for exchange, tools, expertise, and for fostering bi- and multi-lateral agreements on accidental pollution prevention and transboundary contingency planning management.

- The perception of upstream and downstream countries is different regarding accidental water pollution. Joint strategies and common environmental quality standards are therefore necessary for transboundary warning and alert systems.
- Few river basin commissions have endorsed or applied the UNECE Checklist for Contingency Planning (e.g. only ICPDR has taken note of and recommended it, but not yet applied it⁶).
- Cooperation between the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention and the Water Convention (including their JEG) and the river basin commissions should be enhanced, with the aim of improving implementation of UNECE safety guidelines⁷, to improve transboundary contingency planning.
- The UNECE Checklist on Contingency Planning, and other materials produced by the JEG, requires further promotion and application across the UNECE region by countries (including the relevant competent authorities and operators) and river basin commissions.

3. Wrap-up and Co-Chairs' conclusions

- There is a lack of awareness of the UNECE Checklist in some countries and lack of integration of its elements into national legislation.
- As outlined above, Armenia tested the Checklist with Georgia, and provided recommendations for possible future improvement, such as editorial changes and the inclusion of additional questions.
- A key issue with the use and implementation of the Checklist and joint contingency planning stems from language barriers between neighbouring and riparian countries. Furthermore, as the Checklist is available only in English, French and Russian, it may require translation into national languages to facilitate its use/application. Such translations by respective competent authorities, or facilitated by river commissions is encouraged.
- Further awareness-raising and testing (preferably joint testing between neighboring and riparian countries) of the Checklist is recommended to improve contingency planning at the national and transboundary levels. Countries and river basin commissions should review, test and modify it according to the national contexts, and report back to the JEG about their experiences with the Checklist and, if necessary, recommendations for its improvement.
- River basin commissions should seek to upgrade their early warning systems in order to enhance preparedness for accidental water contamination involving hazardous soluble or floating substances. Neighbouring countries should be encouraged to establish joint/harmonised monitoring stations/sampling points.
- Effective contingency planning requires regular trainings and joint exercises. The river basin commissions are therefore encouraged to regularly carry out joint testing of their transboundary contingency plans with neighbouring and riparian countries.
- River basin commissions across the UNECE region should establish information-sharing channels, in order to exchange knowledge, tools, lessons learned and experiences in accidental transboundary water pollution prevention, early warning and monitoring, and to prevent the duplication of efforts, if any, in these fields.
- Countries (including competent authorities and operators) and river basin commissions should – further to the [Checklist for contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters](#) – make use of guidance materials produced by the JEG, such as the [Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for the Management and Retention of Firefighting Water](#), [Safety Guidelines and Good](#)

⁶ The ICPDR discussed the UNECE Checklist for contingency planning within its Accident Prevention and Control Expert Group in spring 2015. The experts welcomed the UNECE initiative and suggested that the Group take note of the elaborated checklist, which might be useful for countries in integrating some aspects into their existing bilateral or trilateral practices. Moreover, the ICPDR adopted a resolution at its 13th Standing Working Group Meeting in 2015: “The ICPDR takes note of the elaborated checklist documents for transboundary contingency planning and tailings management facilities and encourages the Contracting Parties to make use of these documents.”

⁷ Materials produced by the JEG are available at: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/industrial-accidents/publications.html>

Practices for Oil Terminals, Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Pipelines, and Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Tailings Management Facilities and related methodology, to improve accidental transboundary water pollution prevention, preparedness and response.