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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE****CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES  
TO THE CONVENTION ON THE TRANSBOUNDARY  
EFFECTS OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS****Report of the Fourth Consultation for Points of Contact****Introduction**

The Fourth consultation for points of contact for the purpose of accident notification and mutual assistance designated within the UNECE Industrial Accident Notification (IAN) System was held on 25-26 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.

The consultation was held under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) within the framework of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. This activity was part of the workplan under the Convention (ECE/CP.TEIA/19, Annex I), following the stipulation by the Conference of the Parties that the consultation should be held to discuss the results of the tests and exercises performed and allow to further review the effectiveness of the IAN System. It should also lead to discussion on the compatibility between IAN System and European Union (EU) Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) to verify if there was no redundancy between them (ECE/CP.TEIA/19 para 67)

**Objectives**

The key objectives of the Fourth consultation were to provide a forum for:

- 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;
- Discussing the effective use of IAN System alongside with other available notification systems; and
- Sharing experience and good practices in organization of national rescue and civil protection directorates.

## Participation and chairmen

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, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom. Representatives of International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and The European Commission Joint Research Centre (EC JRC) also attended the consultation.

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 on the first day and by Mr. Robert Mikac, Head of National Centre 112 of National Protection and Rescue Directorate on the second day.

## Opening of the consultation

Mr. D. Trut, Director of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, opened the fourth consultation on behalf of the host country and welcomed the representatives of points of contact to Croatia and to Zagreb.

Mr. L. Wyrowski, secretariat to the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents welcomed participants on behalf of the UNECE and expressed his gratitude to 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 stressed 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<sup>1</sup>.

## Programme

The consultation consisted of three sessions.

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

Session I also comprised a presentation made by representative of International Safety Research Inc. Europe in the area of sharing good practice in conduct of exercises with the aim of critical revision of contingency plans.

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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 IAN and CECIS systems. The task force held two meetings on 17 September 2009 and 14 January 2010. The minutes of these meetings are available at Convention's website at: <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/pointsofcontact.html>

In session II, points of contact discussed the effective use of IAN System alongside other systems existing under other international agreements and used for notification of different emergencies, including the EU CECIS System. Background to the discussion was given in the presentations held by (a) Austria showing an overview of country obligations for using notification systems in an event of emergency situation with possible transboundary effects, (b) EU JRC on the network concept for data exchange and format elaborated in the scope of nuclear and radiological incidents, and (c) the Netherlands showing benefits of standardization in data format for use in electronic applications for notification.

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

The programme and the presentations are available at the Convention's website at <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/pointsofcontact.html>

### **Effectiveness of IAN System, outcome of the tests and exercises, conclusions**

In the period between the third and the fourth consultation 20 communication tests and 3 exercises were performed.

The communication tests have shown that there were still points of contact that did not acknowledge the receipt of notification reports, despite the fact that the acknowledgment is done automatically by opening relevant notification reports in the web-based application. In some cases this was connected to problems with using the IAN System accounts.

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

- Technical means like electronic applications have been important for exchange of information, at the same time telephone needs to be available for a back-up (Swiss exercise);
- Exercises, whether analytical or in-field, have shown that cross-border notification is a very difficult discipline due to:
  - Decision-making on notification, especially when the criteria for it was not very clear (Swiss exercise);
  - Lack of data or rough data coming from the field to be put into the notification reports, often with prior translation into English, French or Russian, when the translation has presented an additional challenge (all three exercises);
- The notification should be exercised because it shows where gaps and shortcomings are and where the point of contact can improve (all three exercises);
- The international notification should be seen as an objective in full-scale exercises conducted at local level. The exercising scenario should be addressing this objective. Also realistic exercises, including request from abroad and pressure from media, would be important for reviewing the capacities in notification (Swiss exercise);

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<sup>2</sup> The in-field exercise between Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia has been conducted within an Assistance Programme's project on joint management of transboundary emergencies from spills of hazardous substance into the Danube River

- IAN System web-based application has been found user-friendly, at the same time could be improved by:
  - Introducing changes for the parts of reports on chemical substance, due to difficulty in changing the information on substance when updating the report. Also the field for substance name/formula was considered too small in size (Croatian exercise);
  - Introducing a possibility to reply on assistance requests what would allow an assistance-requesting country to keep a record on offers for assistance. Also a possibility of sending short messages with request for additional information or providing short notification without completing full report could bring added value (Croatian exercise);

The leading countries for the exercises also formulated actions to be undertaken. Some of the actions should be taken at country level and others at international level and thus should be discussed during the consultation:

- Country level:
  - Raise awareness at local level on the obligation for reliable international notification and involvement of staff of points of contact in preparing drills' scenarios;
  - Introduce regular testing/exercising between the neighbouring countries, involving staff other than of points of contact (e.g. response teams);
  - Maintain good knowledge of structure, means and procedure for response to emergencies.
- International level:
  - Provide commonly agreed tests and exercises' plan;
  - Address the issue of avoiding duplication and inconsistencies in notification, if a number of notification systems are in use;
  - Make changes to IAN System to increase its user friendly operation.

The representatives of points of contact thanked the countries which performed the exercises for providing valuable material for consideration. They held an interesting discussion during which the following suggestions have been made:

- Tests and exercises should be performed between neighbouring countries or within catchment areas of rivers;
- Exercises including mutual assistance should be performed UNECE wide;
- Notification systems in transboundary context, and equally for testing, should be used as follows:
  - For water-path 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 of absence of more dedicated systems and for mutual assistance request; and
  - For air-path scenario IAN should be used;
- Ideal situation would be with one system for all notification. Since this situation was assessed as impossible to achieve, standardization between systems should be considered;

- IAN System should enable a reply function, especially to request for assistance; and
- Modifications to the IAN System should be only recommended once exercises and tests would be conducted by more points of contact so that recommended changes reflect the needs of the majority;

Based on the discussion and the suggestion made, the representatives of points of contact agreed that:

- Points of contact who do not comply with notification procedures under the IAN System should be urged to do so.
- Points of contact who face problems with using the IAN web-based application should contact the secretariat in order to fix them shortly
- Tests and exercises with use of IAN System should be performed on three levels:
  - Level 1 – communication tests.  
Should be performed only between neighbouring countries with a frequency of 1-2 tests yearly initiated by each point of contact to all the points of contact of neighbouring countries.
  - Level 2 – analytical exercises, comprising also top-table or full scale drills.  
Should be performed between neighboring countries with a frequency of 1 such exercise performed biennially 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 – full scale exercise with reviewing the provision and receipt of mutual assistance.  
One such exercise should be encouraged biennially by points of contact, when possible to be organized by a country with economy in transition and supported by other countries.
- Recommendations for any modifications to IAN System and its web-based application should be made only after a considerably higher number of tests and especially analytical exercises would be carried out;
- Secretariat should be collecting the suggestions for modifications to IAN System for consideration at the next consultation of points of contact and possible submission to the subsequent meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

### **Effective use of the IAN System alongside other notification system, outcome of the presentations, conclusions**

The introductory presentations on effective use of IAN System alongside other notification systems pointed at following issues:

- ECE member countries have been operating various notification system for chemical emergencies in accordance with various agreements, among them IAN, CECIS, warning system of the International River Commissions, etc.;
- Each existing notification system was best adapted for its purpose what proves its usefulness, at the same time there have been emergency situations which required application of more than one system;
- Lower number of systems could be more efficient and more user friendly, at the same time the systems have been providing back-up to each other;

- During an emergency there has always been only little time to decide which information to send via which system;
- The use of manuals for applications of the different systems did usually fail in real situations;
- Blocks of standards applied across different notification systems for notification of chemical emergencies could present a solution, where well-defined set of data elements could be exchanged between systems;
- The standardization was introduced in the notification for radiological emergencies with International Radiation Information eXchange (IRIX) as a standard characterized by a well defined set of data elements that can be exchanged (machine to machine) using a XML schema through a web-service;

The representatives of points of contact acknowledged in the discussion the issues presented. They agreed that there were too many notification systems and at the same time all of them were necessary to maintain. The solution to apply standardization across various notification systems was commonly appreciated and supported and especially that standardization:

- Was not to replace any of the systems but to allow communication between them;
- Would facilitate the job for points of contact when sending notification;
- Would require one training on the standard instead separate training for each system; and
- Would allow minimizing of mistakes.

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 can be exchanged machine to machine should be elaborated and subsequently introduced under the IAN System.

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

Points of contact requested the secretariat to contact international bodies hosting other notification systems and inform them about the recommendation to elaborate a common standard for notification of chemical emergencies, so that information would be available to the Conference of the Parties on the interest of these bodies vis-à-vis standardization.

The points of contact also recommended that the Conference of the Parties would consider calling for establishing a working group to jointly elaborate the standard for chemical emergencies. This working group should comprise of representative in charge for different notification systems.

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

The representatives of points of contact thanked Croatia and France for presenting good practices and national systems used in every day work by the respective rescue and civil defence authorities.

## **Closing**

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to all the speakers for their interesting presentations and to the representatives of points of contact for their valuable input into the

discussion during the fourth consultation. He congratulate on elaboration of important agreements related to further tests and exercises with IAN System and on the recommendation for standardization.

The Convention secretariat, speaking also on behalf of the points of contact, thanked the National Protection and Rescue Directorate and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia for having made excellent organization of the consultation.