

Economic Commission for Europe

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

Twelfth meeting

Geneva, 29 November – 1 December 2022

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

Industrial Accident Notification System

Results of the online consultation of the Points of Contact

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Conference of the Parties of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) at its ninth meeting (Ljubljana, 28–30 November 2016) called upon all Parties and invited other States to keep the contact details of their Points of Contacts, operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, up to date and to carry out and participate in tests of the Industrial Accident Notification (IAN) System (ECE/CP.TEIA/32, para. 66). The Conference of the Parties, at its eleventh meeting (Geneva and online, 7–9 December 2020), adopted a workplan for 2021-2022, which included as a non-core activity an electronic consultation for Points of Contact on the ECE Industrial Accident Notification System (ECE/CP.TEIA/42/Add.1).

The present document contains a summary of the eighth online consultation for the Points of Contact to the IAN System, conducted on 10 November 2022, following a connectivity test of the System on 21 July 2022.

Introduction

1. The eighth online consultation for the Points of Contact to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Industrial Accident Notification (IAN) System was held on 10 November 2022; it discussed the results of the preceding connectivity test, the subregional tests conducted by lead countries and the requirements for an upgrade of the IAN System. The results of both the online consultation and the test are included in this document.
2. In order to allow countries to verify their access to the IAN System in advance, the secretariat announced on 20 June 2022 by email¹ that a connectivity test would be held in the following weeks and that the test results would be discussed during the online consultation for the Points of Contact to the IAN system following the test. The exact date of the test was not known to the countries in advance. The secretariat conducted the connectivity test on 21 July 2022.
3. After the connectivity test, the secretariat processed the results and presented them at the online consultation. The consultation was held in WebEx on 10 November 2022 in English, with support available to the Russian-speaking participants by the secretariat through the chat. The secretariat's presentation of the final test results² was made available on the Convention website at: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/369428>.

I. Agenda, participation and test results

4. The online consultation was open to all Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention and to non-Parties in the ECE region.
5. The consultation was attended by 37 representatives from the following 25 countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland. The meeting was moderated by the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention secretariat.
6. The secretariat opened the online consultation and outlined the objectives of the meeting, which were to:
 - (a) Discuss the results from the connectivity test held on 21 July 2022 and draw recommendations for future such tests;
 - (b) Share experiences among Points of Contact about the lessons learned from conducting subregional tests in the IAN System in the biennium 2021–2022;
 - (c) Review the conclusions and recommendations from the last (seventh) online consultation of the Points of Contacts, which was held on 10 June 2020; and to
 - (d) Discuss the required maintenance, fixing and upgrade of the IAN System.
7. The secretariat reported that on 21 July 2022 at 11:11 a.m., Central European Time, an early warning report was sent in the exercise mode of the IAN System to 48 registered Points of Contact.
8. The main test results were the following:

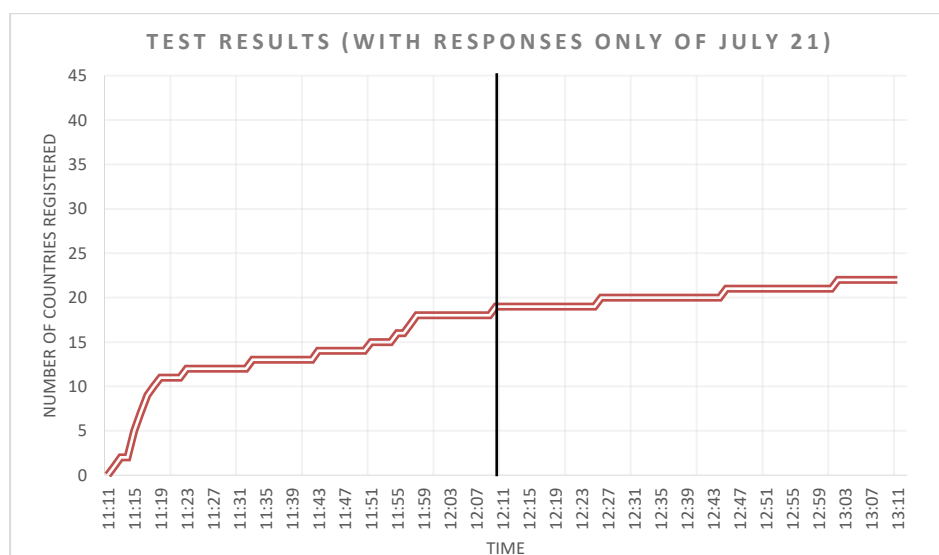
¹ The email was sent to all Points of Contact registered in the IAN System, with their Focal Points in copy.

² The analysis of the test results reflects the state of information as of 27 October 2022.

(a) 29 countries acknowledged receipt of the accident report,³ which is more than half of the 48 registered Points of Contact in the IAN System and more than at the previous test (25 countries out of 46 registered in 2020);

(b) Out of those countries that responded, 19 acknowledged receipt within the recommended time limit of one hour (see figure 1 below),⁴ representing 40% of those registered in the IAN System which is 3% higher than the same indicator last time (2020). In addition, three countries reacted still on the same day,⁵ two countries acknowledged receipt on the following day⁶ and five more later;⁷

Figure 1: Number of countries which responded within one hour



(c) Out of the registered Points of Contact, 19 did not acknowledge receipt of the accident report,⁸ which represents less than a half of the registered Points of Contact in the IAN System;

³ In the order of confirmations received: Hungary, Czechia, Croatia, Switzerland, Germany, Monaco, Slovenia, Sweden, France, Spain, Denmark, Romania, Luxembourg, Serbia, Ukraine, Netherlands, Armenia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Austria, Estonia, Norway, Belarus, North Macedonia, Russian Federation, Finland, Poland, Portugal, Cyprus.

⁴ In the order of confirmations received: 11:12 a.m. – Hungary, 11:13 a.m. – Czechia, 11:15 a.m. – Croatia, 11:15 a.m. – Switzerland, 11:15 a.m. – Germany, 11:16 a.m. – Monaco, 11:16 a.m. – Slovenia, 11:17 a.m. – Sweden, 11:17 a.m. – France, 11:18 a.m. – Spain, 11:19 a.m. – Denmark, 11:23 a.m. – Romania, 11:33 a.m. – Luxembourg, 11:43 a.m. – Serbia, 11:51 a.m. – Ukraine, 11:55 a.m. – Netherlands, 11:57 a.m. – Armenia, 11:58 a.m. – Lithuania, 12:10 p.m. – Republic of Moldova.

⁵ In the order of confirmations received: 12:26 p.m. – Austria, 12:45 p.m. – Estonia, 13:02 p.m. – Norway.

⁶ In the order of confirmations received: 22 July at 04:13 a.m. – Belarus, 22 July at 08:55 a.m. – North Macedonia.

⁷ In the order of confirmations received: 28 July at 13:14 p.m. – Russian Federation, 28 July at 15:00 p.m. – Finland, 29 July at 10:02 a.m. – Poland, 5 August at 17:40 p.m. – Portugal; 27 October at 08:14 a.m. – Cyprus.

⁸ In alphabetical order: Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, European Commission, Georgia (non-Party), Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (non-Party), Latvia, Malta (non-Party), Montenegro, Slovakia, Tajikistan (non-Party), Türkiye (non-Party), United Kingdom, Uzbekistan (non-Party).

(d) In the biennium 2021-2022, one Party to the Convention (Montenegro) registered in the IAN System, so that now all Parties to the Convention are registered. One non-Party from Central Asia benefitting from assistance in the framework of the Convention (Turkmenistan) is still not registered in the IAN System; Türkiye (non-Party) is registered with an invalid email address;

(e) Six non-Parties in total (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Tajikistan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan) are registered in the IAN System on a voluntary basis. None of the non-Parties acknowledged receipt of the accident report;

(f) Compared with the previous exercise in 2020, the number of countries that responded to the 2022 connectivity test was higher (29 responses in 2022 compared with 25 responses in 2020) and the percentage of total number of countries which responded within the recommended time limit of one hour has increased (from 37 per cent in 2020 to 40 percent in 2022);

(g) 11 countries registered in the IAN System did neither react to the 2020, nor to the 2022 IAN connectivity tests. Among these were six Parties (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovakia, United Kingdom) and 5 non-Parties (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan);

(h) Lost access information (forgotten login names and/or passwords) prevented some Points of Contact from promptly logging in to the IAN System.

II. Lessons learned from the connectivity and subregional tests conducted using the IAN System

9. Twenty-five countries or Parties⁹ participated in the eighth online consultation of the Points of Contact organized by the secretariat on 10 November 2022. The secretariat presented the results of the ECE IAN System connectivity test and the attendees discussed the test results, including lessons learned and recommendations for future such tests. The attendees also discussed the conduct of subregional tests in the IAN System in the biennium 2021–2022, reviewed the conclusions from the previous (seventh) online consultation of the Points of Contact and discussed the required upgrade of the IAN System.

(a) Lessons learned from the connectivity test

10. Some countries reported that they could not log in or logged in later due to lost access information or the absence of the person who had the access information to login at the time of the test. Cyprus informed the secretariat about access problems and after remediation steps regained control and reacted to the test. Slovakia indicated that it had an outdated password.

11. It was also discovered that some of the accounts in the System were marked to receive only mutual assistance reports (as was the case with one of Poland's two accounts in the system). Besides, Poland flagged not having received the notification report, and after consultations with the secretariat undertook remediation steps to reconfigure its email address. A separate test was consequently conducted, with timely reaction from Poland's Point of Contact. The secretariat, on its side, verified that all accounts can receive both mutual assistance and notification reports. The secretariat also encouraged all Points of Contact to

⁹ Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

add the secretariat's e-mail addresses (admin.system@unece.org; ian@unece.org; and ece-teia.conv@un.org) to the list of trusted senders in order to avoid similar issues in the future.

12. Out of the 19 Points of Contact that did not acknowledge receipt of the test, five participated in the eighth online consultation and two of them (Cyprus and Slovakia) explained their lack of reaction. Italy reported by email before the consultation an issue with its login name and password, which prevented its PoC from reacting to the test. Albania, Kazakhstan, Türkiye (non-Party) and United Kingdom were all registered in the System with an invalid e-mail address and, with support from the secretariat, all of them, apart from Türkiye which did not react to the secretariat's emails, re-registered in the System following the test.

13. The secretariat noted that all Parties are now registered with valid email addresses and commended Montenegro on joining the IAN system in the current biennium.

14. Romania suggested that future connectivity tests by the secretariat be conducted without announcing that the test was forthcoming, explaining that this would provide a better idea of the real level of preparedness for industrial accidents in the ECE region. Romania also enquired about the lack of reaction from the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) to the connectivity test, wondering if they had a read-only account. The secretariat clarified that the ERCC had the right to acknowledge receipt of the accident notification message and that their email seems to be functioning as ERCC had informed the secretariat in advance of this meeting that they would be unable to participate in the consultation.¹⁰

15. The Russian Federation suggested sending two messages announcing the upcoming connectivity test, possibly copying additional emails too, and marking the messages as important to facilitate a higher response rate. The secretariat explained that the accident notification emails are sent automatically from the System to registered contacts, not allowing copying other contacts. It also explained that the announcement email indicating that the test was forthcoming could be marked as important, if at all sent next time, bearing in mind the above suggestion by Romania.

(b) Lessons learned from the subregional tests conducted by lead countries

16. The countries reviewed the conclusions of the previous (seventh) online consultation of the Points of Contact, held in June 2020. One such conclusion was that selected lead countries should conduct IAN System tests at the subregional level and report about the results of their tests at the meetings of the Points of Contact and/or Conference of the Parties.¹¹ In the biennium 2021–2022, subregional tests were conducted by Switzerland (28 October 2021) –which notified France (no reaction) and Germany (reaction within one minute) – and by Slovenia (19 November 2021) that notified Italy (reaction within 5 minutes). Both countries shared further information about the exercises at the meeting, including lessons learned.¹² Slovenia also shared its experience in using the IAN System to notify Croatia about a real industrial accident – an explosion and fire at an upper-tier Seveso chemical facility – that occurred in Kočevje on 12 May 2022, in which it encountered difficulties in reaching Croatia. Croatia confirmed the receipt of accident report 12 days later.

¹⁰ Since the 8th online consultation also the European Commission Environment Directorate-General formally registered as a Point of Contact in the IAN System.

¹¹ The lead countries were Belarus (conducted a test in late 2020), Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

¹² Further information about the presentations is available on the meeting website at <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/369428>.

17. Switzerland reported that it had experienced difficulties with inserting information on the wind direction in the IAN System when conducting the subregional test, which had delayed by several hours the sending of the notification email to the affected countries. Slovenia faced the same problem, both during the exercise in 2021 and the real accident in 2022, suggesting that this problem be fixed to ensure the effectiveness of the System.

18. Romania and Switzerland proposed holding more frequent connectivity tests in the next biennium. In response, the secretariat encouraged countries to hold subregional tests more often, involving one or more countries. Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Switzerland volunteered to hold such tests in the biennium 2023–2024. The secretariat was requested to reach out to Croatia to invite them to consider taking the lead in a subregional test. The secretariat also reminded the lead countries to kindly copy the secretariat when conducting such exercises.

(c) Required maintenance and upgrade of the IAN System

19. The secretariat reported on multiple existing computer security problems of the IAN System, which was last updated in 2013–2014, and informed participants that one of them also led to the System’s shut down in early 2022. It also reported that a temporary solution for that problem was found, while several other application components and libraries as well as Java and Tomcat also need to be updated to the latest safe versions to prevent security problems and future unexpected shutdowns, and to ensure compliance with United Nations cyber security standards and requirements. The secretariat stressed the need to urgently fix these cyber security issues and encouraged countries to provide funds to ensure regular maintenance of the IAN System.

20. The secretariat also presented several existing technical glitches of the IAN System,¹³ which undermine the effective operation of the System by its users and a prompt notification in case of a real accident with possible transboundary effects, as encountered by Slovenia in 2022. The secretariat highlighted that this could also carry reputational risks and adversely affect effective preparedness, response and mutual assistance. It called on participants to consider providing additional funds for this essential upgrade to fix existing technical glitches in operating the IAN System, which could then also address the above cybersecurity issues. It stressed the importance of this upgrade in view of the United Nations Secretary-General’s call that every person on the planet be covered by an early warning system within the next five years to come.

21. The secretariat also recalled previous proposals made by the Points of Contacts to upgrade the System with the objective to enhance its functionalities and user-friendliness, such as the sending of short messages (SMS) or the development of an application for the smart phone. It explained that such enhancements could be introduced, depending on the funds made available by countries, while noting that also enhancements require regular maintenance and stressing the need to focus on fixing the security and technical glitches first.

22. The participants discussed the IAN upgrade requirements. Austria highlighted that it was important that the Points of Contacts could manage their own accounts without involvement of the secretariat. It also noted that it was confusing that old accounts could not be deleted in the IAN System, which created the impression that a country had more than two active accounts. The secretariat explained that it could only deactivate old accounts, as done in the case of Austria, and that it was currently also possible to register two accounts on the same email, which subsequently causes difficulties for users. Austria stressed the importance

¹³ Further information about the presentations is available on the meeting website at <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/369428>.

of tackling the security and technical glitches, offering to investigate if additional funds could be provided to finance a part of this upgrade.

23. Switzerland offered to consider contributing financially also a part of the IAN upgrade, if countries expressed that the IAN System was important for them to ensure the sending of accident notifications and ensure early warning. Switzerland also mentioned that it would have other means than the IAN System to notify neighbouring countries about an accident.

24. Romania suggested drawing attention to the required upgrade of the IAN System at the upcoming twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Poland supported this and proposed initiating relevant discussions at the EU coordination meeting, involving the Czech presidency, to agree on a common approach towards upgrading the System. The secretariat welcomed the proposal and recalled that the upgrade of the IAN System was currently in table 3 of the draft workplan for 2023–2024, meaning that it would not be implemented without lead Parties and additional funds being made available for this.

25. Further proposals to introduce enhancements in the System were discussed, such as the introduction of an SMS function, proposed by the Republic of Moldova. Austria also suggested that telefax communication should be used in parallel to ensure effective communication during accident notifications. Switzerland proposed that at least 10 countries reflect jointly on the needs with respect to the required upgrade of the System. The secretariat suggested that, if funds were made available for these or the above upgrades, a questionnaire could be developed to agree or possibly vote on different options that would address priority needs.

26. The secretariat also reminded participants about a letter sent on 20 June 2022 to all Points of Contact, with a copy to all Focal Points, inviting them to consider providing financial or in-kind contribution for the above upgrade, including for regular maintenance, and to possibly share related information about additional contributions at the upcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

27. Finally, it was agreed that the secretariat would capture the results of the test and the consultations in the present document, share them with all attendees of the consultations and present their highlights at the upcoming twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Geneva, 29 November – 1 December 2022).

III. Recommendations and conclusions

28. The following main recommendations and conclusions were drawn from the connectivity test and discussions at the eighth online consultation:

(a) There is a need for continuous exercises on the bilateral and multilateral levels to increase the number of countries which respond to connectivity tests, including within the recommended time limit of one hour. Points of Contact are encouraged to test the IAN System jointly in the framework of tabletop exercises, independently and back-to-back with assistance activities;

(b) In order to increase the level of preparedness and effective response to industrial accidents with possible transboundary effects more regular tests and training of the Points of Contacts should be conducted at the subregional level by lead countries;

(c) Points of Contact were invited to volunteer to act as lead countries for the subregional connectivity tests;

(d) It was agreed that those countries which conduct tests at the subregional level should implement them before the end of the current biennium (2021-2022) as well as in the

next biennium (2023-2024), with the secretariat in copy, and present the results at the next consultation of the Points of Contact as well as at the respective meetings of the Conference of the Parties in 2022 and 2024;

(e) Points of Contact are responsible to keep their contact details in the IAN System up to date and to ensure that they know their access information (login name and password) and how to use the IAN System (using the instructions) to be able to react to an accident or request for mutual assistance without delay;

(f) Profound cybersecurity problems and technical glitches of the IAN System pose threats to the continued functioning and operation of the System, undermining effective preparedness, response and mutual assistance in case of an industrial accident with potential transboundary effects. Countries are urged to provide the necessary funding for the regular maintenance of the IAN System, the fixing of technical glitches as well as possibly an enhancement of the System's functionalities. This was considered particularly important to allow for a multi-hazard approach and in view of the United Nations Secretary-General's call for every person on the planet to be covered by early warning systems within 5 years to come;

(g) Non-Parties which are still not registered in the System or registered with an invalid email address should be encouraged to (re-)register in the IAN System a Point of Contact, operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in accordance with article 17 of the Industrial Accidents Convention;

(h) Participants considered the online exchange among the Points of Contact as very useful and suggested that such be held again in the next biennium.
