

Guidance on the role and tasks of national focal points

UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents

Background

At its twenty-fourth meeting (Bucharest, 14-15 April 2014), the Working Group on Implementation noticed that there was lack of clarity among its members about the roles and tasks of a national focal point to the Convention and it suggested that this be clarified. Hence, the secretariat prepared this document in order to facilitate the provision of clarification and guidance to national competent authorities. The information on the role and tasks of national focal points is drawn from working practices since the entry into force of the Convention as well as key documents stipulating roles of focal points such as the “Terms of reference for the preparation and implementation of projects under the Assistance Programme”.¹ Furthermore, it draws on the common practices of other UNECE multilateral environmental agreements.

At its twenty-fifth meeting (Geneva, 2-3 July 2014), the Working Group recommended that this document be distributed to current and new focal points and be made available on the Convention’s homepage.



What is a focal point?

A national focal point is a person nominated by one of the designated national competent authorities. The nomination of a focal point is a working arrangement to allow for the information exchange and flow between the secretariat and the competent authority(ies) nominated as per art. 17 of the Convention.

In addition to Parties, also non-Parties to the Convention are encouraged to designate a national focal point. **Please note that a focal point is not a Point of Contact** designated pursuant to arts. 10 and 12 to the Convention.

What are the key roles and tasks of the focal point?

As a contact person in the different countries, a key role of the focal point is to facilitate the liaison between the secretariat and the national competent authority(ies) by ensuring coordination at the national level among the different authorities dealing with the prevention of, preparedness for and response to industrial accidents.

Amongst the tasks of a national focal point are the following:

- ✓ Coordination of activities related to the Industrial Accidents Convention at the national level amongst the different authorities dealing with the prevention of, preparedness for and response to industrial accidents;
- ✓ Facilitation of information sharing amongst national authorities/institutions;
- ✓ Forwarding relevant information to the national authorities/institutions (e.g. to the points of contact);
- ✓ Facilitation of communication between the secretariat and the competent authority(ies), including with regard to the attendance of meetings, financial contributions by Parties to the Convention’s trust fund and in-kind contributions;
- ✓ Coordination of the preparation and submission of the national implementation report to the secretariat, including ensuring that the deadline for submission is met;
- ✓ Facilitation of the distribution of information on the Industrial Accidents Convention at the national level, supporting the Convention’s implementation and/or awareness-raising with regard to possible accession/ratification, in cooperation with other national counterparts;
- ✓ Informing the secretariat about the name and contact details of a successor to the current focal point(s) as soon as changes are known, by writing to: ece-teia.conv@un.org (in case of a change of the focal point(s));
- ✓ Informing the secretariat about changes in the name and organizational structure of the national competent authorities as soon as such changes are known, by writing to: ece-teia.conv@un.org;

- ✓ Providing information and advice to the secretariat on organizational and substantive matters related to the implementation of the Convention and its Assistance and Cooperation Programme in the country, or facilitating the provision of such information by liaising with colleagues;
- ✓ Attending meetings under the Convention and/or identification of suitable participants (also from other national authorities, depending on the type and focus of the meetings organized).

For focal points from countries beneficiary to the Assistance and Cooperation Programme², additional responsibilities are derived from the “Terms of reference for the preparation and implementation of projects under the Assistance Programme”:

- ✓ Coordination of the preparation and timely submission of the national self-assessment and action plan according to the Strategic Approach³;
- ✓ Coordination of development and submission of project proposals for capacity-building activities;
- ✓ In cooperation with the other involved authorities/institutions, identification of participants to activities organized under the Assistance and Cooperation Programme and communication of the list of participants to the secretariat.

All focal points are encouraged to take the online training course “Introduction to Industrial Accidents”, developed in partnership between UNECE, UNEP and OCHA, which is available in Chinese, English, French and Russian from: www.unece.org/env/teia/pubs/onlinetraining2013.html.

Why is a focal point needed?

The Convention stipulates in art. 17 (para 1) that each Party shall designate or establish one or more competent authorities for the purposes of the Convention. Communication with an institution, like the competent authority, has to go through official channels and has to be addressed to the right persons. Focal points have a key role to: (i) Facilitate that the communication to the competent authorities reaches the right level; (ii) Follow up on requests sent by the secretariat or office holders; and (iii) Pass information from the country to the Convention secretariat or its office holders.

In addition to facilitating formal communication, focal points engage in informal communication with the secretariat to provide information or advice on approaches to engage with national authorities and on substantive and other matters.

Furthermore, focal points have a key role in the framework of the Convention’s Assistance and Cooperation Programme: According to the “Terms of reference for the preparation and implementation of projects under the Assistance Programme”, beneficiary countries, which have qualified for the implementation phase of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme, should submit project proposals through their competent authorities and/or through their focal points.

Requesting countries to nominate national focal points is common practice by the secretariats of multilateral environmental conventions.

The UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention lists all national focal points on its website at: www.unece.org/env/teia/contact.html.

How is a focal point nominated?

To nominate a national focal point, a formal communication by the Minister or Head of Department is required to be sent to the secretariat of the Convention via email to: ece-teia.conv@un.org.

A country can nominate one or several focal points, e.g. from different competent authorities or different levels of administration (state, federal). In nominating a national focal point, due regard should be given to the role and tasks listed above. In addition, fluency in English is highly desirable for national focal points to be able to fulfil their tasks.

In case of a change of focal points, this information can be communicated by the previous focal point to the Convention’s secretariat at: ece-teia.conv@un.org.

¹ See: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/teia/doc/AP/AP_Tools/TORs_for_AP_project_proposals_-_FINAL_-_10_Mar_2014_-_clean.pdf.

² See: <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/ap/introduction.html>

³ The Strategic Approach for the Assistance Programme (ECE/CP.TEIA/2008/5) was adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting (ECE/CP.TEIA/19, para. 50 (a)). It is available online from: www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/industrial-accidents/areas-of-work/assistance-programme/envteiaapttools.html.

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