



Teleconference (through WebEx) of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents

Geneva and online, 09:30 – 12:00 CET, 2 June 2023

Minutes

The teleconference of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG) was moderated by the JEG co-Chairs – Mr. Peter Kovacs (Hungary) from the Water Convention and Mr. Bojan Srdic (Serbia) from the Industrial Accidents Convention – and Ms. Danka Thalmeinerova, JEG member from Slovakia, lead party for the organization of the 2024 JEG workshop. Further to them, the following members of the JEG were present at the meeting: Ms. Lubov Hertman (Belarus), Mr. Pavel Danielka (Czech Republic), Ms. Tuuli Tulonen (Finland), Mr. Gerhard Winkelmann-Oei (Germany), Ms. Esi Esuon Biney (Ghana), Mr. Zoltan Torok (Romania), Ms. Lendita Dika (North Macedonia), Mr. Ylber Mirta (North Macedonia), Mr. Vitali Mutaf (Republic of Moldova), Ms. Iryna Grokhovetska (Ukraine) and Mr. Adam Kovacs (ICPDR, observer). The following JEG members did not participate in the teleconference: Mr. Pavel Dobeš (Czech Republic), Mr. Maratbek Ermatov (Kyrgyzstan), Mr. Serik Akhmetov (Kazakhstan), Mr. Yevhen Morshch (Ukraine) and Ms. Radojka Radojevic Stojilovic (Serbia). Additionally, Mr. Peter Panenka, representing Vodohospodárska výstava, a state enterprise of Slovakia, who is actively involved in the organization of the 2024 JEG workshop, was also present at the meeting.

The teleconference was organized and substantively prepared by the UNECE secretariat, represented by Mr. George Georgiadis, Ms. Ksenia Nechunaeva, Mr. Joseph Orangias (Industrial Accidents Convention secretariat) and Ms. Hannah Plotnykova (Water Convention secretariat), in cooperation with the JEG co-Chairs and Slovakia as a lead Party.

1. Opening

The opening session was moderated by the co-Chair from Hungary, who welcomed the JEG on behalf of both co-Chairs and explained the objectives of the teleconference. The meeting continued with a short tour de table of all present JEG members, and other participants stating their name, position and organization. The secretariat then presented the outcomes of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the Industrial Accidents Convention (29 Nov-1 Dec 2022) and planned JEG activities for the 2023-2024 biennium. It highlighted that the CoP welcomed with appreciation the work carried out by the JEG and endorsed the JEG activities for the 2023-2024 biennium, including the “organization of the workshop on preventing accidental water pollution, early warning and alert systems, including identification and exchange of good practices and collection of examples of Natech accidents affecting transboundary waters.” The JEG co-Chair from Hungary underlined the importance of the support provided by Germany to the JEG activities.

2. Preparation of JEG workshop on prevention of accidental water pollution and early warning system (and back-to-back JEG meeting) in 2024

This session was moderated by a JEG member from Slovakia. The JEG co-Chair from Hungary presented the key conclusions of the seminar on emerging risks in accidental water pollution: focus on natural hazard-triggered accidents (Budapest and online, 5 October 2022). The session proceeded with a presentation on the draft concept and programme of the 2024 JEG workshop by the JEG member and another representative from Slovakia. They confirmed Slovakia’s leadership in organizing and hosting the JEG workshop in Bratislava in spring 2024. They explained the background, potential topics and format of the JEG seminar (1 day) based on the *Draft concept note for the JEG workshop*, sent to the JEG members prior to the JEG Teleconference. The workshop will be organized as a physical and online meeting; the Slovak representatives offered to explore possibilities to organize a TMF site visit (half a day after the workshop and before the JEG meeting). At the JEG meeting (6 October 2022), it was decided that the 2024 workshop should focus also on preventing accidental water pollution and early warning systems. However, bearing in mind the plans of the European Union to fund the project involving a 2025 global seminar on early warning systems, which UNECE would lead in cooperation with World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Office Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) (to be confirmed later this year) – on which the secretariat would aim to work closely with the JEG - to avoid duplications, **the JEG members agreed to shift the focus of its 2024 workshop from early warning systems to the prevention of water pollution from tailings management facilities with a potential to affect transboundary water bodies.** Additionally, a few proposals and conclusions resulted from the discussions:

- The workshop should cover no more than four themes/topics in accordance with the target audience. That is why it is important to identify the desired outcomes and conclusions of the upcoming workshop at the conceptualization stage. Additionally, the JEG members agreed to hold the JEG workshop in late spring 2024.
- The co-Chair from Serbia confirmed his readiness to deliver a presentation on the prevention of accidental water pollution at the workshop.
- The Water Convention secretariat supported to switch the focus on transboundary cooperation for preventing accidental water pollution as well as covering not only Pan-European region but also others, for example, Africa, and offered to facilitate the nomination of the speakers for this subject.
- It was suggested to include the topic of the increasing vulnerability of industrial facilities in the context of military conflicts in the programme of the upcoming workshop. The co-Chair from Hungary mentioned that environmental remediation due to the implication of military conflicts on the environment could be an interesting topic to explore by the JEG.
- The secretariat will organize an additional call with the JEG co-Chairs and the representatives from Slovakia to discuss the main focus and scope of the workshop and further prepare the workshop, JEG meeting and site visit.
- The secretariat would provide additional guidance and written feedback on the *concept note for the JEG workshop* shortly after the JEG Teleconference. The JEG members also agreed to share their insights regarding the *concept note for the JEG workshop* in written form by the end of June 2023.

- The JEG observer from ICPDR offered to explore the possibility of organizing a series of online workshops dedicated to early warning systems following the 2024 workshop, which could lead to the topic of 2025 workshop.

In pursuance of the discussion, the co-Chair from Hungary presented the outline for a meeting of the JEG, which will be held back-to-back with the JEG workshop in Bratislava in 2024.

3. Possible update of the Guidelines to facilitate the identification of hazardous activities for the purposes of the Convention in view of TMFs

This session was moderated by the co-Chair from Serbia. The Co-chair explained that the CoP to the Industrial Accidents Convention mandated the JEG, in cooperation with the Working Group on Implementation (WGI) and the Bureau, to assess over the biennium 2023-2024 whether there exists a need for the Guidelines to facilitate the identification of hazardous activities for the purposes of the Convention to be revised and updated in order to cover more comprehensively the hazards and risks arising from tailings management facilities (TMFs) and to share its findings in the form of an official document with the CoP at its thirteenth meeting.

The secretariat presented **the draft background note on the Consideration for the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention and its Guidelines on Identification of Hazardous Activities to more comprehensively cover the hazards and risks of tailings management facilities**, which it had prepared in cooperation with the Bureau's small group on mine tailings safety and circulated to the JEG members before the meeting. The background note provided information and several options for consideration regarding the Guidelines' and Convention's coverage of TMFs. The secretariat explained that the background note would be further developed with inputs by the JEG and small group members, including with a draft recommendation for the CoP, in lead up to the Bureau's meeting in October 2023. It encouraged the JEG members to provide their written inputs as follows:

- **By 9 June 2023**, the JEG members were requested to provide their preliminary feedback in track mode to the secretariat for the current version of the document. This round of feedback should only focus on what is already written in the document, including how to further develop the criteria within the tables under Section III.
- **By the end of June / early July 2023**, the secretariat will update the document, finalize the tables, and circulate it to the JEG members.
- **By 14 August 2023**, the JEG members are encouraged to provide feedback into the tables of the updated version of the document. These include assessments of each of the options/approaches in Section III.
- **The document will then be updated** by the Industrial Accidents Convention's small group on mine tailings safety, discussed at the Industrial Accidents Convention's Bureau meeting and further developed in advance of the thirteenth meeting of CoP to the Industrial Accidents Convention CoP-13 in late 2024.

The JEG members agreed to provide written inputs in accordance with the proposed timeline. They highlighted that given the increasing frequency of TMF-related accidents in the last ten years and their impact on human health and the environment, as well as the projected increase in demand for minerals with regards to the technology required for the green energy transition, it is important to reflect on how to best address these hazardous activities under the Convention. They also reflected on the Convention's current coverage of TMFs, guidelines and tools for TMFs developed under the Convention and the many assistance activities that have supported countries in strengthening mine tailings safety and preventing related accidental water pollution to protect humans and the environment. It was also acknowledged that the workshop in 2024 focusing on tailings management facilities should be used as a platform to collect inputs and recommendations on how to better apply *Guidelines on Identification of Hazardous Activities* in the context of building capacity for safe management of tailings facilities.

4. Closing of the teleconference

The co-Chairs closed the teleconference at 12.00 ET and thanked all JEG members for their contributions and the secretariat for organising the teleconference. The co-Chairs extended their gratitude to Slovakia for hosting the 2024 workshop.