

Marine Pollution Incident (MPI) Area II and III (A)

MPERSS STATUS – FRANCE REPORT

1. Status

France is the Area Meteorological and Oceanographic Coordinator (AMOC) for Met Areas II and III (A). The current status is operational. Météo-France works closely with the "Centre de Documentation, de Recherche et d'expérimentations sur les pollutions accidentelles des Eaux" (CEDRE), to provide support in the event of a marine pollution incident.

Météo-France provides the following elements:

- wind speed and direction;
- wave parameters;
- visibility;
- weather parameters (fog, rain, etc.);
- pollutant drift forecast.

2. Marine Pollution Incidents

In 2006, support was provided to 69 incidents and 5 exercises. Major events with international implication, were as follows:

2.1 Ece Chemical tanker

During the 30 January 2006, the *General Grot Rowecki* bulk carrier (Malta), transporting 26,000 tons of phosphates from Safi in Morocco to the Police in Poland, collided with the Ece chemical tanker (*Marshall Islands*), en route from Casablanca, Morocco to Ghent, Belgium.

The accident occurred in a zone located 50 nautical miles (90 km) west of Cherbourg, near the Casquet Traffic Separation Scheme in international waters. The Ece, transporting 10,000 tons of phosphoric acid, developed a leak and a significant list. The regional marine rescue coordination centre (CROSS-Jobourg) coordinated the crew rescue operation, in collaboration with the British Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The twenty-two crew-members were safely evacuated to Guernsey. The *Abeille Liberté* tug boat was sent to the scene of the accident.

The French "*Préfecture Maritime*" for the English Channel and the North Sea (Prenar-Manche) then carried out a pollution risk analysis, with the support of the French Navy anti-pollution centre (CEPPOL) and CEDRE. In addition to the cargo, according to information provided by the ship owner, there were 70 tons of propulsion fuel (IFO 180), 20 tons of marine diesel and 20 tons of lubricating oil onboard the Ece. The *General Grot Rowecki*, whose bluff bow was slightly damaged, was able to continue its journey.

The *Abeille Liberté* tug arrived on site on 31 January at approximately 7 a.m. The assessment teams did not note any pollution, and boarded the two damaged ships. The Ece showed a 25° stabilized list to port and was no longer operational. After the assessment had been completed, the vessel was taken in tow by the *Abeille Liberté* around 3:30 p.m., bound for the port of Le Havre. In the course of towing, the Ece sank 70 m deep 50 nautical miles west of the cape of The Hague, on 1 February at

3:37 am. The wreck lay in international waters, on the continental shelf of the United Kingdom, in the French exclusive economic zone and the French pollution response zone.

The Manche Plan, a bilateral Franco-British mutual aid agreement for rescue and pollution response, was activated on 1 February 2006.

Negotiations between French and British authorities on the one hand and the ship-owner and insurers on the other hand came to an agreement on 16 June 2006 for the removal of the hydrocarbons remaining onboard the wreck (some forty tons) and for the planned controlled release of the phosphoric acid, by opening the access channels to the six tanks using a remote controlled robot. The operation was undertaken by the ship-owner during the summer period, under the control of the authorities.

Météo-France provided tailored marine forecasts in support to these operations.

2.2 Lebanon conflict

From 13 to 15 July 2006, bombings in southern Lebanon hit the Jieh electric power plant (30 km south of Beirut). Part of the heavy fuel oil burned. According to the Lebanese authorities, estimates of 10,000 to 15,000 tons of unburned fuel oil were spilled onto the shoreline and drifted at sea, pushed by south-westerly winds. The pollution soon extended to impact almost half of the 200 km of Lebanese coastline.

On 25 July 2006, the Republic of Lebanon's Ministry of Environment requested assistance through the REMPEC regional Mediterranean response centre from the members of the Barcelona Convention and other partners of the Mediterranean Action Plan. On 27 July, the Ministry also requested experts and materials to the European Commission, which communicated this request to the member States. By 5 August, the pollution had spread to the Syrian shores, and Syria in turn requested assistance from REMPEC.

REMPEC called upon CYCOFOS (the Cyprus Coastal Ocean Forecasting and Observing System) for information on pollutant behaviour and drift predictions. Like the MOTHY model activated by Météo-France on CEDRE's request, these predictions indicated a tendency for the pollution to drift northwards, progressively polluting the shoreline.

Several satellite images, handled by CYCOFOS and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, confirmed this northward movement of the pollution. However, this imagery seemed to indicate a more significant presence of pollutant near the coast than the models. On 20 August, aerial observations clarified the situation: practically no significant volumes of oil were still drifting at sea.

2.3 Gijón 06 exercise, Spain

Météo-France took part in the Gijón 06 exercise. This exercise consisted in a simulation of a collision causing the discharge of 15,000 tons of crude oil followed by a fire. It was controlled by SASEMAR from May 22 to May 24 in Gijón, Spain. The major objective of the exercise was to validate and compare various drift and weathering models within the framework of the Spanish program post-*Prestige* ESEOO aiming to develop a national capacity of oil spill drift forecast.

3. Supporting Services

Météo-France is prepared to provide tailored marine forecasts worldwide in support to marine pollution emergencies.