

## AT SEA RESPONSE

### Marine Response Centre

1. In almost all cases involving a national response, whether ship or offshore installation related, the MCA establishes a Marine Response Centre (MRC) at the most appropriate location. The MRC considers and implements the most appropriate means to contain, disperse, and remove potential pollutants from the scene based on all the information available to them.
2. For a shipping incident this location may be within the Marine Emergencies Information Room (MEIR) within the MCA HQ, the nearest MRCC or suitably equipped port operations room. Depending on the complexity of any associated salvage operation, the MRC may be co-located with/near the SCU.
3. For an incident involving an offshore installation it is intended that the MRC is established within the appropriate MRCC, though other locations may be considered.
4. The MRC may be headed by the Duty Operations Director (DOD) or the Head of Counter Pollution and Salvage Branch. Either of these takes control as soon as they arrive at the chosen location. Until then, a CPSO/Counter Pollution Officer<sup>1</sup> is nominated to control the setting up of the MRC.
5. The purpose of an MRC is to provide an organisation through which the MCA can discharge its responsibilities for mitigating and resolving pollution at sea. The responsibilities of an MRC are likely to include:
  - determining the extent of the problem;
  - determining priorities for action in protecting sensitive areas and dealing with pollution;
  - monitoring progress and effectiveness;
  - liaising with the other response centres involved;
  - management of financial expenditure;
  - recording of the decisions taken, and;
  - the preparation of regular briefings for circulation to all interested parties.
6. The MRC consists of the following:
  - **Head of the MRC and Deputy Head of the MRC** - responsible for the overall control of the MRC activities.

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<sup>1</sup> The DCPSO is likely to be fully engaged with incident response and unable to assume this role

- **MCA Counter Pollution and Salvage Officers and/or HQ based Mariner** - arranges initial set-up of the MRC, link with SCU/OCU and immediate air and sea-borne operations; plans the longer term response, co-ordinates the air and surface activity and arrangements for cargo transfer – possible dual role for SCU.
- **MCA Environmental Scientist** - provides environmental and modelling advice to the MRC and serves as the point of contact for information from the EG, STAC and other environmental regulators – possible dual role for SCU.
- **MCA Resources and Claims Lead** - identifies and organises the mobilisation of resources, manages procurement where necessary, establishes contact with casualty's owners/ insurers and maintain an audit trail for subsequent cost recovery action – possible dual role for SCU/OCU.
- **Harbour Master / Operator representative if an Offshore installation** - Liaison point of contact between Port/Harbour Incident Command Centre, or the OCU or ERC for an Offshore incident.
- **Fisheries Dept representative** - to advise on the impact of the pollution on fisheries with fishing organisations and to liaise with fishing organisations<sup>2</sup>.
- **Local Authority Liaison Officer** - acts as liaison with the Shoreline Response Centre (in Northern Ireland, an officer of the NIEA).
- **Environmental Liaison Officer** - to provide advice on environmental matters and the link to the Environment Group.
- **HM Coastguard Liaison Officer** - provides link between MRC and the relevant MRCC Ops Room.
- **Commercial Contract Representatives** - provides links with front line spill contractors.
- **MCA Public Relations Officer** - liaison with the DfT / DECC Press Office and the media.

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<sup>2</sup> Where the relevant fisheries department is part of the Scottish Government, or is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, this officer also acts as liaison officer with the devolved administration. If the incident involves waters designated under the Government of Wales Act 1998. The MRC also contains a liaison officer nominated by, or on behalf of, the Welsh Government.

- **MRC Room Manager and admin support staff** - setting up and subsequent administrative running of the MRC.

### **Options for the clean up operation**

- 7 The Head of the MRC (subject to any instructions from SOSREP in a salvage operation) decides on actions to contain, disperse, or neutralise pollutants. These decisions include the following methods of response:
  - assess and monitor;
  - dispersant spraying operations
  - mechanical recovery operations; and
  - cargo transfer operations.
- 8 The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has responsibility for approving the use of oil spill treatment products in English and Welsh waters. For pollution within Scottish waters, Marine Scotland is the regulator for the approval and use of oil treatment products. DECC approves the use of dispersant by offshore operators and is advised by Marine Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). In the event of a pollution incident they work closely with devolved administrations and the Environment Group to provide advice to incident command. Where applicable MMO, enforce the Environmental Damage Regulations 2009 for damage to protected marine species and habitats in English waters. Irrespective of the relevant regulatory regime, oil spill treatment products must be approved for that purpose and be included in the UK approved list of products before they can be considered for use in UK waters. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) are the regulator in Northern Ireland.
- 9 Where DECC is the approving authority, it has agreed that the oil spill treatment products selected by operators and detailed in the Oil Pollution Emergency Plan (OPEP) must be on the UK list of approved products; this ensures that a consistent approach is applied across the UK.
- 10 The aim of any clean-up operation is to minimise the damage (environmental, ecological, amenity or financial) that the pollution would cause. The MRC decides between the options for clean up bearing in mind the following:
  - the limitations on the effectiveness of at sea clean up techniques;
  - the distance from shore of the casualty;
  - the type of pollution;
  - the weather conditions and currents; and
  - the time needed to deploy resources to the scene.

- 11 **Appendix I** outlines the procedures for counter pollution operations at sea.

### **Dispersant spraying**

- 12 Dispersants remain a primary UK response to oil spilled in the marine environment. Dispersant response is directed by the MRC with permissions and advice, from DECC for offshore installations, and from the regulators – MMO, DARD (for Northern Ireland) and Marine Scotland. Dispersants may be considered for application sub-surface in the event of a seabed release of oil involving the offshore industry. The manufacture and use of dispersants and other oil treatment products is subject to strict regulation.

### **Introduction of fishing restrictions**

- 13 Under Part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (FEPA), Departments or Agencies with food safety responsibilities can prohibit the taking of fish and edible plants from a designated sea area. They may do this when the consumption of contaminated food from that area could present a health risk to consumers. They may therefore restrict fishing, on a precautionary basis, if resources are, or are likely to become, contaminated.
- 14 Under Regulation 7 of the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) Regulations 1998 Local Food Authorities can issue a Temporary Prohibition Order if it is satisfied that the consumption of live bivalve molluscs or other shellfish (echinoderms, tunicates or marine gastropods) taken from a designated shellfish harvesting area (including a relaying area) is likely to cause a public health risk. The Temporary Prohibition Order shall prohibit the placing on the market or the gathering of any such molluscs or other shellfish from the specified area.
- 15 The Food Authority is usually the Environmental Health Department of the Local Authority or the Port Authority. A Temporary Prohibition Order may be made for a period of 28 days and may not be extended beyond that time unless Ministers or designated officials give their consent.

### **Termination of fishing restrictions**

- 16 FEPA orders can last until such time as it can be shown that there are no food safety issues. Once it is felt that restrictions can be lifted this is achieved through a revocation order. The revocation order might lift all restrictions or lift only some restrictions depending upon the circumstances.