

Lessons Learned and Challenges in Implementing the Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan: NOWPAP MERRAC Experience

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In the sea area of the far-eastern Asian countries, Northwest Pacific region, 243 oil spills and 45 Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) spills over 10 tons have occurred in the region from 1990-2008. One major oil spill was the Hebei Spirit incident which occurred off Taean coastal area of Republic of Korea on 7 December 2007. Hebei Spirit lost about 12,547kl of crude oil, and resulted in enormous marine environmental and economical damage. Consequently, the NOWPAP Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan was activated on 10 December 2007 and deactivated on 14 January 2008. While assisting the Korean Government to facilitate the response of the spill, MERRAC took the responsibility as the secretariat of the Plan and serve as the operational link between the NOWPAP member states. China and Japan provided absorbents to Korea within the framework of the Plan. MERRAC also assisted experts from UN/EC who visited the oil spill area to provide technical support.

At the 11th NOWPAP MERRAC Focal Points Meeting held in MERRAC in June 2008, the participants exchanged views on the response activities, the lessons learned and relevant co-operative activities among the members during the Hebei Spirit response operation. For more efficient implementation of the Plan, the meeting agreed to organize NOWPAP BRAVO (communication exercise) twice a year and hold a table top exercise annually at Competent National Authorities (CNA) Meeting on a regular basis. Also, the meeting agreed to submit information on national performance standards and/or regulations on application of non mechanical methods. The International Workshop on Response to Marine Pollution in the NOWPAP Region was also organized in Incheon, Republic of Korea, 5 June 2009 for sharing of



experiences and information learnt from the oil spills that occurred in the NOWPAP region, e.g. Hebei Spirit incident.

Through the experience, we have recognized the importance of regional co-operation. For efficient implementation of the Plan, MERRAC will make the Plan as a living document by continuously reviewing and updating it as well as by conducting routine exercises. As NOWPAP Regional Oil and HNS Spill Contingency Plan were adopted on October 2008 by the 13th NOWPAP IGM, MERRAC will increase the capacity to implement regional cooperative activities on HNS with NOWPAP member states and international organization.