

Meeting of the Focal Points of the
Regional Marine Pollution Emergency
Response Centre for the Mediterranean
Sea (REMPEC)

REMPEC/WG.18/12
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Agenda Item 12

MEDITERRANEAN ASSISTANCE UNIT

Note by REMPEC

1. The Mediterranean Assistance Unit for combating accidental marine pollution (MAU) has been created by the decision of the Eight Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, held in Antalya, Turkey, 12-15 October 1993 (UNEP (OCA)/MED/IG.3/5). The original proposal for its establishment was discussed and approved by the Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points held in Malta, 22-26 September 1992 (REMPEC/WG.5.12). The text of the relevant decision of the Contracting Parties can be found in the document RIS A.
2. The main objective of the MAU is to rapidly provide the services of selected experts to the Contracting Parties, which so request in case of emergency. Contracting Parties assigned the responsibility for the organization and activation of the MAU to REMPEC.
3. Following the establishment of the MAU and its first activation in March 1994, REMPEC prepared a set of "Arrangements and Instructions for Facilitating the Activities of the MAU", aimed at expediting its deployment and facilitating its operations. REMPEC Focal Points examined and endorsed the proposed arrangements and instructions in their Meeting in Malta, 4-8 October 1994 (REMPEC/WG.10/17, paragraphs 50-51 and Annex IV).
4. The initial arrangements concerning the activation and operation of the MAU were negotiated in the coming years with selected centres of expertise and individual experts. Emphasis was put on establishing relations with recognized centres of expertise, who could make available their experts, but also support them with back-up resources and services available at such centres.
5. In 1999 REMPEC began a complete revision of the arrangements related to the MAU, regarding in particular the directory of potential MAU members, and the arrangements for the activation of MAU and its operation. The process included the following:
 - Updating the list of experts and centres of expertise, that could be co-opted in the MAU when the need arises;

- preparing an agreement with REMPEC's travel agents for making travel arrangements and for issuing air tickets outside normal working hours;
- preparing a specific insurance policy for experts included in future MAU missions;
- preparing a standard Memorandum of Understanding, which REMPEC could sign with selected centres of expertise or individual experts, and which defines conditions, roles and responsibilities of experts participating in MAU missions and of REMPEC respectively.

Updating the list of experts and centres of expertise

6. In December 1999 REMPEC requested its national Operational Focal Points (Circular Letter No. 10/99) to inform the Centre of the names and references of experts and centres of expertise existing in their respective countries, that could be co-opted in the MAU when the need arises. By the end of June 2000 REMPEC received replies from 9 Contracting Parties: 6 national authorities provided the names of their experts who could be included in the MAU, while 3 coastal States indicated that they do not have experts of the required profiles.

7. In addition, through its network of correspondents in the field of preparedness and response to accidents involving hazardous substances other than oil, REMPEC started negotiations with several established centres of expertise in this field from the European countries outside the Mediterranean, with a view to including them in the MAU should the need arise for the type services they can offer (cf. also paragraphs 19 and 20).

8. By adding these new experts and centres of expertise to the directory of individuals and institutions with whom the working relations have been already established, the possibility of selecting the most appropriate members of the MAU when its activation is requested by a Contracting Party affected by a marine pollution accident, has been significantly increased.

Travel arrangements and air tickets

9. With a view to ensuring that the necessary travel arrangement could be prepared and air tickets for MAU missions issued **outside normal working hours** and in particular on **non-working days** and on **public holidays**, REMPEC negotiated with its standard travel agent in Malta an agreement that would guarantee that these services are available when the MAU needs to be mobilized in case of emergency on a very short notice. Such agreement was reached, at no additional costs, in January 2000 and REMPEC now has the possibility to immediately issue **prepaid air tickets** for any MAU mission throughout the year.

Personal insurance of the MAU members

10. In order to ensure that all MAU members are covered by a personal insurance policy for the duration of their assignment with the MAU, REMPEC negotiated the terms of such specific insurance with a reputable insurance agency in Malta. Between December 1999 and May 2000 the policy was amended several times with a view to covering specific risks to which MAU members could be exposed while on mission. Final version has been agreed upon in May 2000 and entered into force on 1 June 2000. The policy covers personal accidents (including death and permanent disablement), medical and emergency travel expenses, cancellation, curtailment and change of itinerary, personal baggage, travel delays and hijacking. The policy automatically covers any person called on duty from the time his/her flight leave his/her country until returning back to the country. Cover becomes automatic subject to declaration by REMPEC of any journeys to be undertaken. The cover also includes a clause envisaging that should a person be called over the weekend, the full policy benefits are extended to the traveler if REMPEC transmits by fax to the office of the insurance company the details of the traveler.

Memorandum of Understanding concerning the participation in the MAU

11. Taking into consideration that negotiating the terms and conditions of participation in the MAU of experts (from established centres of expertise or individual) could significantly delay the activation of the MAU in case of emergency, REMPEC prepared a standard Memorandum of Understanding that could be signed in advance with the potential members of the MAU. It covers the roles of both parties (centres of expertise/expert and REMPEC), alerting and mobilization, visa and immigration procedures, travel arrangements, confidentiality, financing, terms of payment, liability of the parties and a number of general and final provisions.

12. REMPEC has submitted the text of the memorandum to the Legal and External Relations Division of IMO, for its review and approval.

13. Following approval, REMPEC will endeavour to sign as soon as possible the Memorandum of Understanding with the following centres of expertise

- CEDRE (Centre de documentation de recherche et d'expérimentation sur le pollution accidentelles des eaux), Brest, France.
- BASF Aktiengesellschaft - DUS/Fire Department, Ludwigshafen, Germany.

14. REMPEC intends to sign similar MoUs with other centres of expertise, both in the Mediterranean and in some EU countries outside the Mediterranean region.

MAU Revolving Fund

15. Further to the decision of the Ninth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, Barcelona, 5 - 8 June 1995 (UNEP (OCA)/MED.IG.5/16) based on the request of the 1994 Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points, REMPEC set-up the MAU Revolving Fund, into which money recovered from insurers as reimbursement of expenses related to the MAU mission could be deposited.

16. The balance of this account prior to the last Meeting of Focal Points (on 10 September 1998) was USD 18,433.19. The account was not debited during the period under observation, and with the accrued interests the balance on 30 June 2000 was USD 19,756.91.

Other developments

17. In the beginning of 2000 REMPEC purchased two (2) portable laptop computers that could be used *inter alia* during the missions of the MAU. Databases and decision support tools installed in these computers are expected to increase the efficiency of the MAU and its independence in the field work, in particular in case of accidents in remote parts of the region.

18. REMPEC intends to explore the possibility of linking these computers with portable GSM telephones, with a view to facilitating the exchange of data and messages between the MAU mission members and REMPEC (and other centres of expertise within or outside the region.)

New initiatives

19. Taking into consideration the current lack of expertise, available through the MAU, in the field of rehabilitation of wildlife and in some other ecological aspects of accidental marine pollution response, REMPEC plans to initiate contacts with NGO's having **expertise and experience in e.g. cleaning and rehabilitation of birds**, with a view to including their specialists in the directory of MAU experts.

Actions requested from the Meeting of Focal Points

20. The Meeting is invited to take note, examine and comment on actions taken by REMPEC regarding the organization and procedures for mobilization, activation and support of activities of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit.