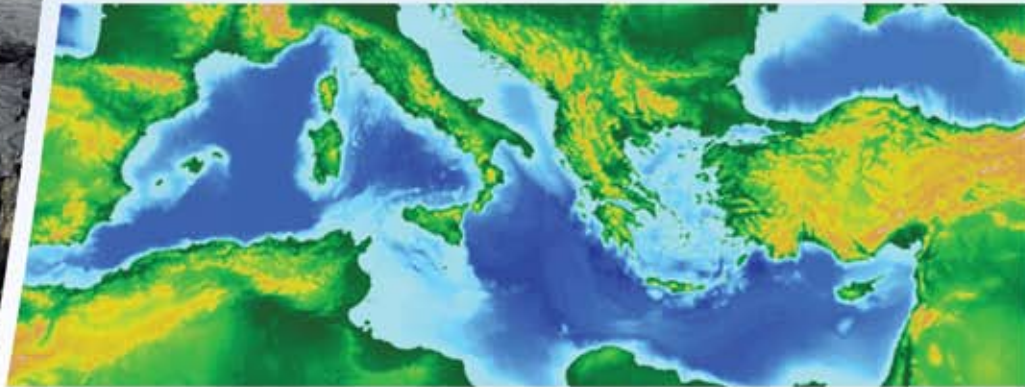


Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

The Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea is a semi-enclosed sea with specific hydrological and ecological features which make it vulnerable to the effects of pollution. It has a fairly extensive coastline (46,000 km long) when related to its water mass and pollution hazards are extremely critical to the environment and to related economic interests. The traffic density of merchant vessels in the Mediterranean, which represents less than 1% of the total area covered by the world's oceans, is particularly high. It is estimated that 30% of the international sea-borne trade originates or is directed to the Mediterranean ports or passes through the Mediterranean Sea and that some 20-25% of the world's sea-borne oil traffic transits through the Mediterranean.



The Barcelona Convention and the 1976 Emergency Protocol

The Intergovernmental Meeting on the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea, held in Barcelona in 1975 to consider a Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), emphasised the need to pay particular attention to the protection of this sensitive area against pollution from ships.

A legal basis for international co-operation in the fields of prevention, reduction and combating pollution of the Mediterranean Sea was set up when the Mediterranean coastal States and the European Community adopted in 1976 the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (the Barcelona Convention).

The same Meeting also adopted the Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Oil and Other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency (Emergency Protocol) and established, by its Resolution 7, a regional centre to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol.

Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention

Albania
Algeria
Bosnia & Herzegovina
Croatia
Cyprus
Egypt
European Community
France
Greece
Israel
Italy
Lebanon
GSP Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Malta
Monaco
Montenegro
Morocco
Slovenia
Spain
Syrian Arab Republic
Tunisia
Turkey



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The revision of the Emergency Protocol and the Regional Strategy

Taking into consideration the evolution of the Mediterranean context since the establishment of MAP in 1975, the revision process of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols started in 1993.

In 1995, the Contracting Parties and the Conference of Plenipotentiaries decided to promote regional co-operation for the implementation of the relevant international conventions for the protection of the marine environment from pollution by ships. This decision was followed by the revision of the Emergency Protocol. The new Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea (Prevention and Emergency Protocol) was adopted in January 2002 and came into force in March 2004. In 2005, the Contracting Parties adopted the Regional Strategy for Prevention of and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships which is the roadmap for the implementation of the 2002 Protocol. As not all Contracting Parties have yet ratified the new Protocol, REMPEC is implementing activities under both Protocols, taking also into consideration that the objectives and functions of REMPEC have been extended to reflect the adoption of the 2002 Protocol.

REMPEC

In order to assist the Mediterranean coastal States in the implementation of the Emergency Protocol to the Barcelona Convention, the Regional Oil Combating Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (ROCC) was established in Malta in 1976. Operating on the basis of the decisions of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, the Centre is administered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and hosted by the Government of Malta. It operates within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the first Programme of the Regional Seas of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is financed by the Contracting Parties through the Mediterranean Trust Fund.

The mandate of the Centre was extended in 1987 and its name changed to Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) in 1989

Objectives

The main objectives of REMPEC are the following:

- To strengthen the capacities of the coastal States in the Mediterranean with a view to preventing pollution of the marine environment from ships by ensuring the effective implementation of the rules which are generally recognised at the international level;
- To develop regional co-operation in the field of prevention of pollution of the marine environment from ships, and to facilitate co-operation among the Mediterranean coastal States in order to respond to pollution incidents;
- To assist coastal States of the Mediterranean region in the development of their own national capabilities for response to pollution incidents and to facilitate information exchange, technological co-operation and training; and
- To provide a framework for the exchange of information on operational, technical, scientific, legal and financial matters and to promote dialogue aimed at conducting co-ordinated actions at national, regional and global levels for the implementation of the Protocol.

Activities: Prevention of, Preparedness for and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships

REMPEC's activities are defined every two years by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention taking into consideration recommendations and proposals by REMPEC's Focal Points.

The Centre's activities relate to prevention of pollution of the marine environment from ships as well as preparedness for and response to accidental marine pollution, and co-operation in case of emergency.

This includes:

- Dissemination of information ;
- Training ;
- Assistance in the development of national and sub-regional systems for prevention of, preparedness for and response to marine pollution from ships ;
- Facilitating co-operation and mutual assistance among the Contracting Parties and providing them with technical assistance in case of emergency.

Dissemination of Information

Responding efficiently and promptly against a pollution incident depends primarily on the easy access to relevant sources of information and to knowledge with respect to the type of incident and of pollutant involved, as well as strategies and techniques to respond to marine pollution incidents.

In order to provide the coastal States with the information required for preparing and initiating response operations, as well as to facilitate mutual assistance, REMPEC has developed and keeps regularly updated the Regional Information System (RIS), which provides in a rational way useful data on response to accidental pollution.

The maritime transport oriented database, TROCS, containing information on approximately 700 chemical products and 250 crude oils and petroleum products is also available on a CD-ROM.

Training

Training is the second most important component of the activities of REMPEC. The objective is to assist coastal States in developing their capacities with respect to prevention of and response to marine pollution and to ensure an efficient and coordinated intervention in case of an incident.

REMPEC organises training courses activities and seminars including courses of a general nature and on dedicated topics. The training courses are organised at regional, sub-regional or national levels.

Assistance in the Development of National and Sub-Regional Systems for Prevention, Preparedness and Response

The existence of reliable national systems for prevention of, preparedness for and response to marine pollution from ships, including administrative organization, trained personnel, basic equipment and contingency plans, is considered to be the most important factor for the effectiveness and the success of prevention and response measures.

REMPEC also assists the coastal States in developing bilateral and sub-regional operational agreements and systems between neighbouring countries in the field of preparedness for and response to major marine pollution incidents.



Facilitating Co-operation and Mutual Assistance among the Contracting Parties and Providing Assistance in Cases of Emergency

In order to facilitate co-operation and mutual assistance among the Contracting Parties and to provide them with assistance in cases of emergency, REMPEC:

- Developed and keeps up-to-date a regional communication network;
- Periodically organises communication exercises;
- Provides technical advice and facilitates and co-ordinates mutual assistance between Mediterranean countries;
- Activates, at the request of the Contracting Parties, the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) which provides technical expertise to the national authorities in case of emergency. An “officer-on-duty” on a 24 hour/day basis enables REMPEC to respond promptly to a request for assistance.

Main Achievements

- Publication of a large number of technical papers, training materials, documents, studies and reports;
- Development of various recommendations and guidelines related to prevention of, preparedness for and response to marine pollution;
- Development of the Regional Information System (RIS);
- Development of databases on accidents in the Mediterranean Sea and on chemical products carried by ships (Transport Oriented Database on Chemical Substances - TROCS);
- Development of MIDSIS-TROCS (Mediterranean Integrated Decision Support Information System) decision support tool;
- Training of more than 2500 persons in marine pollution control related matters, thus significantly increasing the level of expertise available in the Mediterranean region in these fields;
- Conducting a number of communication and alert exercises;
- Directly assisting 15 Mediterranean coastal States in the development of their national preparedness and response systems, and in the preparation and implementation of their national contingency plans;
- Assisting in organising major full-scale exercises involving personnel, equipment, vessels, aircraft and other means from several countries;
- Offering technical assistance in case of emergency to national authorities of various Mediterranean coastal States;
- Transferring the Mediterranean experience to other Regional Seas;
- Preparing and managing several technical assistance projects in the field of prevention of and response to marine pollution from ships (EU MEDA Project on Port Reception Facilities, EU MEDA SAFEMED Project, EU LIFE TCY Projects on the Development of Spill Response Capabilities).

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