

The Rosersberg Initiative

Improving the international environmental emergency response system

Background

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (Joint Environment Unit) commissioned a study called “Strengthening the International Systems for Environmental Emergencies Response” for the seventh meeting of the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) held in June 2007 in Rosersberg, Sweden. The AGEE is a forum that brings together environmental experts from around the world to share information, expertise and lessons learned for improved response to environmental emergencies worldwide, and in particular in developing countries, with the Joint Environment Unit serving as the secretariat to this group.

On the basis of the findings of the study and other relevant discussion and strategy papers, AGEE participants agreed that the existing system for environmental emergency response and preparedness was *ad hoc* in key areas and needed improvement. They decided to address this through a new international undertaking that has become known as the Rosersberg Initiative.

Objective

The overall objective of the Rosersberg Initiative is to strengthen the international system in environmental emergencies. As the aforementioned study showed, the existing system contains many elements of effective emergency relief, but it lacks a homogenous and structured set-up with gaps existing in areas of environmental emergency response and response preparedness, including the lack of an international notification system. As the growing number of natural and man-made disasters require a coordinated and effective response from the international community, both on national and global level, the Rosersberg Initiative aims to identify priority recommendations and enable its members to implement them in a participatory manner.

Outset

The Rosersberg Initiative consists of a working group, chaired by a Chair and a Vice-Chair. The Joint Environment Unit serves as secretariat for the initiative. The initiative addresses the existing gaps from three different angles:

1. Through awareness raising, engagement and capacity building activities;
2. Through the improvement of the international legal framework governing the response to natural disasters,
3. Through practical changes regarding response structures and mechanisms on national level.

Each of the three topics and related activities are developed and furthered in a so called “Thematic Area Group”, consisting of members of the Rosersberg Initiative Working Group.

In December 2007, the first meeting of the Rosersberg Initiative Working Group was convened in Tunisia. Participants from 15 countries and international organizations including the European Commission agreed on actions to be undertaken by each Thematic Area Group.

Results of the Tunis Meeting – Next Steps

a) Thematic Area 1: Awareness raising, engagement and capacity building:

Thematic Area 1 aims to increase the awareness of stakeholders and encourage their engagement in environmental emergency preparedness and response through increased communication and advocacy activities. Activities already taken up include

- the creation of an environmental emergencies award
- training for environmental emergencies experts from national authorities and international responders
- the development of a brochure setting out key element of environmental emergency response and the benefits for governments and other stakeholders connected to active engagement.

b) Thematic Area 2: Improving the international legal system in environmental emergencies:

Thematic Area 2 has commissioned a baseline study of the existing international systems that govern environmental emergencies to a well-known environmental law expert. The study analyses binding and non-binding international instruments and agreements and identifies gaps and challenges for improvement, including a range of recommendations for action, such as

- the development of guidelines on environmental emergencies
- a Joint Environmental Emergency Response Plan
- a political mandate for environmental emergencies

The recommendations should enable countries to improve their respective national laws governing their internal response mechanisms as well as the provision of international assistance, such as the deployment of experts and goods on short notice.

c) Thematic Area 3: Improving national structures and mechanisms:

Thematic Area 3 aims to help countries to improve their operational structures and mechanisms to ensure a better, more coordinated and more effective response in case of disasters. To achieve this, a global study of best practices for the provision and receipt of international assistance on national level has been commissioned to a consultant, both in donor and recipient countries, with the goal to develop

- best practice guidance material for the use of national authorities
- guidance material on the establishment and maintenance of a National Focal Point system

In addition, Thematic Area 3 aims to disseminate and implement recently developed tools such as the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) and the Hazard Identification Tool (HIT), both aimed at the rapid identification of secondary environmental risks posed by large industrial sites and infrastructures in case of natural and man-made disasters.

The Rosersberg Initiative Newsletter

Issue One

October 2008

Welcome to The Rosersberg Initiative Newsletter !

With the eighth meeting of international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) to be held from 6 to 8 May 2009 in Brussels, this newsletter has the objective of providing members of the AGEE with updates on progress of the Rosersberg Initiative, undertaken at the seventh meeting of the AGEE in June 2007 in Sweden. The Initiative, aimed at strengthening international preparedness and response to environmental emergencies, consists of three Thematic Areas, namely, TA1: Advocacy and Capacity-Building; TA2: Strengthening International Governance Systems; and TA3: Operational Aspects of Providing and Receiving Assistance. This first issue of the Newsletter focuses on two major efforts aimed at improving international response capacity: the Environmental Assessment Module, and the pilot Environmental Emergencies Training, both of which were launched in August in The Hague.

The Environmental Assessment Module

We are pleased to report the unveiling of the Environmental Assessment Module (EAM), an innovative mobile laboratory developed by the Netherlands within the framework of the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP) to support international response to environmental emergencies. The EAM was officially inaugurated by the Dutch Ministers of Environment and Development Cooperation. Among those also making remarks at the launch were Gerhard Putman-Cramer, Chief of OCHA's Emergency Services Branch, and Christophe Bouvier, Regional Director for Europe of UNEP.

"I wish to extend heartfelt thanks to the Netherlands for their long-standing commitment to supporting our endeavour to respond even more rapidly and effectively," said Putman-Cramer. "In doing so, they continue to set an important example for the international community, and raise the quality standards for international response to humanitarian and environmental crises around the world."

The EAM can be rapidly deployed for disasters involving hazardous substances, together with the relevant technical expertise and two fully-equipped off-road vehicles: one containing a mobile measurement and analysis unit, the other containing materials for logistical support, such as satellite equipment and GPS. The entire EAM can be transported in a cargo aircraft. However, being a modular unit, equipment relevant to a given emergency can be selected and deployed individually.

When deployed, the EAM will be supported by a knowledge network of research institutions and Ministries in the Netherlands to ensure affected countries receive the best available support.

The EAM will be used to assess effects of environmental disasters. It will mainly be deployed in countries that lack the specialist knowledge or capacity needed to deal with environmental disasters.

The development of the EAM is a joint initiative of the Netherlands' Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following recommendations by the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies. Its development and deployment over a five-year period involves a commitment by the Netherlands of €1 million.



Part of the EAM, a generous contribution to international environmental emergency response by the Government of the Netherlands.

The EAM can be deployed at the request of the UN or other international organizations. Countries themselves may also directly request assistance from the Netherlands. A primary client of the EAM will be the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU). The first “deployment” of the EAM took place during the recent biannual Triplex disaster simulation, held in Sweden and Norway in mid-September.

Environmental Emergencies Training

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU), integrated into the Emergency Preparedness Section of the Emergency Services Branch of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was proud to launch the pilot Environmental Emergencies Training in mid-August in The Hague, the Netherlands. It was designed in close collaboration with the Crisis Management Department of the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment; the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Swedish Rescue Services Agency (SRSA).

A comprehensive curriculum -- covering a wide range of issues such as the UN response system to natural disasters, environmental emergencies, personal mission preparedness, information management, stress management, and cultural awareness -- was developed to ensure participants of the training would be mission ready.



Participants and trainers in the pilot Environmental Emergencies Training held from 18-22 August in The Hague, the Netherlands.

The 35 participants in the course, which ran from 18 to 22 August, expressed great satisfaction with the training, and provided valuable feedback. Based on this, the curriculum and methodology are being reviewed by the Steering Committee in order to determine the most appropriate means of rolling out a generic Environmental Emergencies Training, which will contribute greatly to the overall objective of strengthening the international environmental emergency response system, as well as enhancing the resilience of vulnerable countries. The importance of this initiative cannot be overemphasized, and appreciation is hereby extended by the JEU to all countries, organisations and individuals that have been, and continue to be, involved in the process of developing the training.

Save the Date !



AGEE Chairman Chris Dijkens at AGEE 7

The Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) is planning to hold its 8th meeting from Wednesday 6 May to Friday 8 May 2009 in Brussels, co-organized with the European Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre. The AGEE is an international forum that brings together environmental specialists, disaster managers, and emergency policy makers from around the world to share information, expertise and lessons learned to improve preparedness and response to environmental emergencies. We hope to see you there!

Best regards,
Chris Dijkens
Chair, AGEE

The Rosersberg Initiative Newsletter

Issue Two

November 2008

This newsletter aims to provide members of the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) and other interested audiences with updates on progress of the Rosersberg Initiative, undertaken since the seventh meeting of the AGEE in June 2007 in Sweden. The Initiative, aimed at strengthening international preparedness and response to environmental emergencies, consists of three Thematic Areas, namely, TA1: Advocacy and Capacity-Building; TA2: Strengthening International Governance Systems; and TA3: Operational Aspects of Providing and Receiving Assistance.

Green Star Awards Launched

The Green Star Awards, a collaborative initiative among the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Green Cross International and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), were launched on 17 November, with the issue of a press release and the activation of a website. In line with the objectives of TA1 of the Rosersberg Initiative, the awards aim to:



- Increase awareness of environmental emergencies by drawing attention to efforts made to prevent, prepare for and respond to such disasters
- Raise the profile of environmental emergencies
- Underline the connection between environmental impacts of natural disasters, technological accidents and complex emergencies, and their consequences for affected populations and providers of humanitarian assistance
- Increase international participation in preventing, preparing for and responding to environmental emergencies

The awards will be presented on the occasion of the meeting of the international AGEE. The first awards ceremony will take place at the conclusion of the 8th meeting of the AGEE, being held from 6 to 8 May in Brussels, Belgium, co-organized by the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU) and the European Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre (EC-MIC).

The 7th meeting of the AGEE recommended the establishment of a special recognition scheme and requested that OCHA, UNEP and Green Cross International develop a suitable honor. The concept of the Green Star Awards was endorsed by participants in a follow-up meeting held in Tunis in December 2007.

For full details on the awards and the nomination process, please visit www.unep.org/greenstar

Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) User Guide Now Online

We are pleased to announce that the FEAT User Guide is available online at <http://ochaonline.un.org>. Coming under the rubric of TA1 of the Rosersberg Initiative, the FEAT was designed to help improve capacity to evaluate and respond to environmental emergencies.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes can damage infrastructure and result in secondary environmental impacts such as immediate or potential releases of hazardous materials. These can pose acute risks to human life and health, and adversely affect surrounding environments that are vital for livelihoods. Natural disasters may also trigger physical impacts such as salt water intrusion, mudslides, slope instability and flooding.

Disaster response teams are faced with the difficult task of not only dealing with the disaster at hand, but also identifying and responding appropriately to these potential environmental impacts. However, thousands of toxic chemicals could be involved in any given disaster, each with its own toxicity profile, and with a multitude of exposure pathways (e.g. air, water and soil) and receptors (e.g. humans, livestock, fishing grounds). In such complex situations, it can be easy to overlook or misjudge important risks. At the same time, given the often overwhelming demands of disaster situations, complex and full-fledged environmental assessments would be impractical. Therefore, an accurate yet simple tool is required to assist first responders, such as UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams.



With these challenges in mind, the FEAT is a carefully balanced compromise between simplicity and scientific rigor, with emphasis on usefulness to response mechanisms such as UNDAC teams. It provides quick answers in complex disaster situations, even in the absence

of specialized technical resources or expertise.

In summary, the FEAT is a “first aid” tool to identify environmental impacts, and support initial response actions in disaster contexts. It does not take the place of in-depth environmental assessments, which may be appropriate at later stages of the disaster response. Findings from use of the FEAT should be communicated quickly to appropriate organizations so that appropriate actions can be taken, as described in the FEAT User Guide.

The development of this tool was initiated at the recommendation of the 6th meeting of the AGEE. At the request of OCHA, the FEAT has been developed by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), with support from Inspectorate of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment of the Netherlands (VROM). DHV-Engineering Consultancy also contributed to the development of the FEAT.

Environmental emergency responders meeting

The JEU hosted a ‘first-of-its-kind’ two-day training for UNDAC environmental experts in the FEAT on 26 and 27 November in Geneva. This was an important step in embedding the assessment methodology into the UNDAC system. UNDAC environmental experts from UNEP’s Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC), UNEP’s Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, UNEP’s Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), and the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), as well as national experts from Brazil, Denmark, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden have now been fully trained.

The two-day meeting also provided a unique opportunity to bring many of the JEU's most frequent expert collaborators together for the first time to share lessons learned from past deployments, and to discuss future strategies for improving environmental emergency response.

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AGEE 8 - Save the Date !

The 8th meeting of the AGEE is scheduled for 6 to 8 May 2009 in Brussels, and is being co-organized by the EC-MIC and OCHA. The AGEE is an international forum that brings together key stakeholders from around the world to share information, expertise and lessons learned to improve preparedness and response to environmental emergencies.