

PRESS RELEASE

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2006First EMSA Ship
Participation in at-Sea
Anti-Pollution Exercises

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The first at sea anti-pollution exercises in which EMSA participated took place this month. The first of these exercises was organised in the Baltic Sea on 5th September with the participation of 7 EU Member States and Russia. The second was held off the north-west coast of Spain on 11th September with the support of the Spanish maritime safety organisation SASEMAR, and the third was held off the coast of central Portugal on 15th September with the support of the Portuguese Navy.

"This is a really significant step, both for the Agency and for EU maritime safety overall," said EMSA Executive Director Willem de Ruiter, "because it shows concretely that EMSA contracted vessels have tested their equipment and are training their crews to be well prepared for real accidents. EMSA is working in close co-operation with Member States testing the readiness of EU support."

Background

The at sea oil pollution response exercises are being held off the coasts of several EU countries using EMSA vessels and nationally based vessels and aircraft from the civilian and military services, as emergency response operations throughout the EU frequently use both. They also took place under the watchful eye of EMSA experts, which gave an excellent opportunity to prepare the coordinated EMSA/Member State response to future problems.

The first exercise took place in the Baltic Sea and the second two exercises took place off the Atlantic coast. On 5th September, 22 vessels and personnel from 7 EU countries and Russia took part in the Baltic exercise (Balex/Delta) organised by Poland in the Gulf of Gdansk on behalf of Helcom. The EMSA contracted anti-pollution vessels involved were the Otilia and the Breeze.

The two other exercises took place off La Coruña in north-west Spain on 11th September and off Setubal/Sesimbra in central Portugal on 15th September. The Spanish exercise was carried out in close cooperation with the Spanish search and rescue service (SASEMAR) and involved the EMSA-contracted oil pollution response vessel Ile de Bréhat and a SASEMAR tug. The Ile de Bréhat demonstrated its sweeping arm and skimmer capabilities and both vessels operated in tandem to demonstrate boom towing operations. The Portuguese exercise involved the Ile de Bréhat and a frigate, two tugs and a Sea Lynx helicopter from the Portuguese Navy. The exercises were very useful in identifying areas where improvements could be made.

For more information, please contact EMSA External Communications:
Louis Baumard (louis.baumard@emsa.eu.int)
Andrew Stimpson (andrew.stimpson@emsa.eu.int)

At the moment, EMSA already has oil pollution response contracts in place and ships operational in the Baltic Sea (2 ships can be mobilised simultaneously out of a pool of 5), the Atlantic Arc (1 ship based in Brest) and the Mediterranean Sea (1 ship based in Malta). The second wave of four oil pollution response vessels are expected to become operational next year to boost the capabilities in the Atlantic Arc and Mediterranean areas. Following that, from 2007, it is expected that further vessels will become operational, including some to cover the Black Sea area, anticipating the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union.

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