

Abstract

The Role of the Environmental Group in the *MSC Napoli* Incident

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The concept of an ENVIRONMENT GROUP (EG), providing public health and environmental advice to all response units with a role in responding to a significant maritime pollution incident was recommended by Lord Donaldson in his 'Review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control'. The Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) will initiate the formation of an EG to provide advice during any incident requiring a regional or national response. However, the framework established by standing EG's will also enable coordinated and timely environmental input to any other more localised or specialised incidents. It is stressed that the EG's remit is advisory and it has no powers of direction or enforcement. Regulatory functions of individual members of the EG are exercised outwith the Group structure and function. Standing EG's are now well established across the UK.

The scope of EG functions will be directly proportional to the scale and nature of the incident, its geographical location, extent, severity, pollutant involved, potential hazard to human health and the environmental sensitivities. The scale of incident and response and their constituent phases are likely to evolve over time and the functions of the EG will need to be graduated to meet changing requirements, escalating or diminishing in the input to each phase over time. The definition of marine and coastal environment in the EG's context includes public health, the natural environment, water quality, wildlife including fish, cultural, landscape, habitats and socio - economic factors linked to human health, e.g. through food chains.

The Environment Group in the UK facilitate the coordination of wildlife welfare during an incident. In the event that wildlife is affected by a pollution incident there will be public expectation and demand for action to take contaminated animals into captivity for cleaning and rehabilitation. It is imperative that actions taken in pursuit of wildlife welfare be: 1) compatible with wider environmental safeguard requirements; 2) minimise any risk of increasing impacts on uncontaminated or low risk wildlife; and 3) compatible with wildlife conservation. The lead agencies for wildlife welfare action and management will be the RSPCA (England & Wales) SSPCA (Scotland) and USPCA (Northern Ireland) except where special local arrangements are in place (e.g. Shetland). These organisations have well developed and high standards for capture, cleaning and rehabilitation. It is important that the EG direct the welfare efforts of third-parties toward the recognised welfare bodies to ensure the maximum benefit for wildlife conservation.

During the NAPOLI incident in Lyme Bay the EG was set up immediately through the procedures of the UK NCP. The Group provided environmental advice and support to all Response cells for the duration – over two and a half years.