



N° 193 E – News from July/August 2011

Emergency response

Over the past two months, the Emergency Response Department has been regularly involved in the response to the wrecking of the cargo ship *Union Neptune*, which occurred on 22 July off the coast of Gironde, providing assistance on this incident to the maritime authorities as well as [Ceppol](#). The *Union Neptune* was transporting 2,238 tonnes of bulk iron as well as 25 m³ of diesel for propulsion and 2m³ of lubricating oil. Shortly after leaving Bordeaux, the 87 m long vessel was listing heavily and was abandoned by its crew then towed for a short while by the *Abeille Languedoc* before partially sinking in waters 40 m deep, while its bow continued to float near the surface. As it was drifting and creating a hazard for shipping, the *Union Neptune* was blasted on 12 August and now lies on the seafloor, at a depth of 45 m, off Oléron Island. The operations monitored and research conducted by *Cedre* focused mainly on:

- the cargo's toxicity due to the presence of low concentrations of heavy metals in the product transported;
- the behaviour of the oil in case of a spill at sea;
- and various other aspects such as the physical behaviour of iron oxide in the water column and on the seafloor, according to its density and granule size, as well as local currents.

Cedre also gathered information from the manufacturer on the product transported and exchanged with [Lasem](#) and [Ifremer](#) on the product's characteristics and potential impact. [Lasem](#) applied its skills through the analysis of trace elements and [Ifremer](#) the methodology for environmental assessment and monitoring. More detailed information on this incident and the operations conducted by the maritime authorities and [Ceppol](#) is available through the releases on the website of the Préfecture Maritime de l'Atlantique.

Other events at sea also mobilised the Emergency Response Department, including the sinking of the trawler *Antheus* on 11 July, 5 km east of Saint-Vaast-La-Hougue, that of the Belgian trawler *Marco* on 5 August off Sein Island, and the grounding of the cargo ship *Angel 1* on 8 August north-east of Mauritius with 32,000 tonnes of bagged rice and around 1,000 m³ of oil onboard.

In the Caribbean, several events occurred during the summer months. An algal bloom (*Sargassum*) was reported in early July off the coasts of Brazil and French Guiana, and similar observations occurred in Guadeloupe, Saint Martin and Martinique throughout the summer. Assistance on this issue was provided to the relevant authorities. A period of heavy rain in Martinique in early August also caused an oil and water settling tank to overflow and a spill of a few hundred litres of pollutant into Fort-de-France Bay. An assistance mission was organised on site for the Antilles Refinery.

Cedre took part in three [Ice](#) exercises, involving chlorine (from the Belgian [Ice](#) centre), dichloroethane (from *Cedre* to the Swedish [Ice](#) centre) and nitrobenzene (from the Dutch [Ice](#) centre).

Finally, many minor chemical, oil or even organic spills, both at sea and in inland waters, also mobilised the department, giving rise to drift simulations, work in *Cedre's* laboratory, the provision of advice or opinions on the observations made and field missions. One of these incidents involved the analysis of photos of pollution in the Channel in a bid to confirm its organic nature, while another involved a spill of mud and iron chloride in a small Breton river.

Cedre also shared in the authorities' investigation into the origin of an incidence of styrene pollution, resulting in the closure of a beach in the Marseille area.

POLMAR training courses and exercises: sustained activity

A training effort on the specific "marine pollution" aspects of [ORSEC](#) contingency plans was initiated a few years ago by [DAM](#), and is geared towards State services, general councils, fire brigades, local councillors and local authorities' technical services. These courses aim to provide technical elements, but also to explain to participants their roles and responsibilities within the [ORSEC](#) framework in the event of accidental marine pollution, to assist local authorities in the implementation of a specific pollution section of their local contingency plan ([PCS](#)) and to promote local synergies. The

In short

DATES FOR THE DIARY

► NOSCA Seminar, Horten, Norway, from 6 to 8 September. [See the programme here](#)

► Researchers' Night, at Océanopolis, Brest, on Friday 23 September

► Science Village, Brest, from 12 to 16 October

HOT OFF THE PRESS



► "Mieux combattre les marées noires" by [Editions Quae](#), a 202-page publication offering an overview of the world's major oil spills. What conclusions can be made? What solutions can be implemented for better response?

courses comprise a few days of theory followed by either a POLMAR exercise, simple deployment exercises or demonstrations led by the interdepartmental storage and response centres (POLMAR stockpiles). Funded by DAM, these training courses are organised by the POLMAR correspondents at the DDTM and POLMAR stockpiles and are jointly run by CETMEF, Cedre, the local DDTM and the POLMAR stockpiles. During the first quarter of 2011, such courses were run in Guadeloupe and in mainland France in the areas of Var, Morbihan, Alpes-Maritimes and Loire-Atlantique. In total 237 participants were trained.

During the second quarter, training is to be run in the areas of Ile-et-Vilaine, Manche, Bouches-du-Rhône, Finistère, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Corse-du-Sud, Gironde and Pas-de-Calais.

12th IMO OPRC-HNS Technical Group meeting

A member of the management team took part in the 12th IMO OPRC/HNS Technical Group meeting, held in London from 4 to 8 July. This meeting, chaired by Alexander von Buxhoeveden (Sweden), gathered 23 delegations and a dozen observers and NGOs. The work mainly focused on the guides and manuals, training, HNS and cooperation. Cedre, together with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, is in charge of revising the IMO manual on dispersants.

Particularly Sensitive Sea Area

Upon the request of France and Italy and after a year of deliberation, on 17 July 2011 the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee approved the classification of the Strait of Bonifacio as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. From 2012, a pilotage system for ships following the strait and carrying hazardous substances will be introduced.

Oil spill in Yellowstone River (Montana, north-west US)

On 1st July, following the rupture of a pipeline belonging to the American oil company ExxonMobil, around 160 m³ of oil was spilt into Yellowstone River. The leak was immediately plugged and the following week a team was on site to clean the banks using sorbents and vacuum trucks, despite the flood surge creating severe problems. Clean-up is set to last several months, involve over 1,000 people and cost an estimated \$42 million.

Oil spills in the Bohai Sea (China)

A year after the pollution in Dalian ([Newsletter 182](#)), 3 successive leaks broke out on 4 and 17 June and 12 July, involving two oil platforms (Penglai 19-3 and Suizhong 36-1) operated by Conoco Phillips China (COPC) and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), polluting 5,500 km² of seawater. In the end, 16 different sources of leakage were detected. The Chinese Government is continuing to collect evidence and assess the ecological impact of the oil spill, with a view to possible legal action. Clean-up operations are due to be completed on 31 August.

Shell accused of polluting the Niger Delta

On 4 August, a UNEP report on oil pollution in Ogoniland in the south of Nigeria points the finger at the oil group Shell, leading operator in this area. The study conducted over a 14 month period suggests that Shell is responsible for around 7,000 oil spills over the past 50 years, totalling at least twice as much oil as that spilt in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. According to the study, the environmental contamination is such that it would require the largest clean-up effort ever made worldwide which could last 30 years. [See here for details.](#)

North Sea oil spill

On 10 August, an oil spill was caused by the rupture of a pipe on the Shell-owned *Ganett Alpha* platform, located in the North Sea, some 160 km from the Scottish city of Aberdeen. Two leaks broke out, causing a spill of 218 tonnes of crude oil. The leaks were plugged after 10 days: this was the worst oil spill in this area in 10 years.

Bombay: 23rd shipwrecking in 29 years

The cargo ship *MV Rak* flying the Panama flag and transporting 60,000 tonnes of coal and 340 tonnes of oil sank on 4 August off the coast of Bombay. Leaks of oil appeared on 6 August, causing the Indian Coast Guards to deploy oil spill response vessels, aircraft and dispersant. During a dive to survey the wreck, the leak was located and partially plugged. Some 150 tonnes are thought to have been released, impacting the shoreline.

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