UNECE Checklist for Contingency Planning for Accidents Affecting Transboundary Waters

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Background

• Numerous industrial accidents such as the 1986 Sandoz accident in Basel, Switzerland, have shown the need for transboundary contingency planning.

• Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents with support of the UNECE secretariat developed a Checklist (2016), endorsed by the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention and Water Convention.

• Competent authorities encouraged to apply the checklist, which is intended to contribute to limiting the number of accidents causing water pollution and the severity of their consequences.
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The general objective of a contingency plan is to organize an effective response in case of emergency situations affecting water quality, the water regime or water related aquatic ecosystems and to facilitate cooperation, where relevant at the transboundary level, throughout all phases of such emergency situations, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.”

Purpose of the Checklist

- General aim is to take into account transboundary issues in CP and to harmonize prevention approaches of accidents affecting transboundary watercourses
- Tool for harmonized CP between neighbouring or riparian countries
- Contribute to mitigating the number and severity of consequences of industrial accidents affecting transboundary watercourses for human health and the environment
• Transboundary Contingency Planning pillars (Chapter II) and the Guiding Principles (Chapter III) are based on the principles and provisions of UNECE TEIA and Water Conventions

• By implementing the Checklist, countries are working towards fulfilling the obligations of these UNECE Conventions
• Based on adequate emergency preparedness and response planning, as well as on the provision of mutual assistance

• Three pillars of contingency planning:
  • **Emergency preparedness** (on-site, off-site and in a transboundary context)
  • **Response planning**
  • **International mutual assistance**
Guiding Principles for countries for effective CP for transboundary waters

• Guiding principles based on the obligations under UNECE Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions

• Competent authorities play a key role in transboundary CP, countries have to ensure that all necessary international agreements and national legislation are in place

• Based on these provisions, competent authorities should be able to effectively implement a transboundary CP

• General principles: legislation, early warning/alarm/notification systems, joint bodies and financial mechanisms in place; exchange info and consult. between countries

• Specific: Identification, consultation and advice; Monitoring and Prevention; Industrial accident notification systems; Response, Mutual assistance; Exchange of information and technology; Enforcement
Checklist for competent authorities

- Chapter IV: introduction/objectives, application and assessment
- Provide methodological support to competent authorities for the preparation of off-site (transboundary) emergency plans
- Identify gaps or deficiencies in transboundary CP
- Serve as a tool for training stakeholders involved in transboundary CP on international standards
Application of the checklist

The evaluators assessing the results should go through the questions answered (Yes, Partly, No) and subsequently take the following actions:

- **“Yes”**: can be left as is
- **“No”**: the relevant issue should be addressed, unless the evaluator can prove that the question is irrelevant
- **“Partly”**: the issue
  1. should be addressed (in order to tick “Yes” next time)
  2. can be left as is
  3. is not relevant

Responsibility/method: Competent joint bodies of the riparian countries can decide, i.e. by CA of country of origin, the neighbouring country/potentially affected country, or a subcommittee of evaluators/experts from the countries
Assessment of the checklist

• Guiding Principles and obligations under the UNECE Conventions should be carefully studied before the prep., review and evaluation of the transboundary CP

• Upon ticking the boxes, they should also assess the results and take the appropriate actions to improve or maintain a high level of a harmonized CP on transboundary watersheds

• Some Qs in the Checklist are related to on-site emergency plans. Generally valid, regardless of the type of hazardous facility.
Implementation of the Checklist

- Countries (competent authorities, operators, other relevant stakeholders) and River Basin Commissions across the UNECE region and beyond are encouraged to implement the Checklist.

- River Basin Commissions can inform their Working Groups about the Checklist and encourage implementation.
Thank you for your attention!

For more information please contact rebecca.wardle@un.org or visit the website https://www.unece.org/env/welcome.html