

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Interspill 2025 Conference Stream:

- **Case Histories**

Navigating Complexity: Challenges and Learnings in Oil Spill Response Operations in Support of the FSO Safer Salvage Operation Project

Stephane Johnson and Stephane Grenon (TRIOX Environmental Emergencies)

This presentation highlights challenges and shares key learnings from our involvement in the oil spill response preparedness efforts during the Safer Salvage Operation Project (SSOP) in the Red Sea. For this Project, our team: 1) received and commissioned the oil spill response equipment in Djibouti, setting up response kits, and dispatching kits to various locations in Yemen; and 2) provided training to first responders in Yemen and supported the implementation of Command Posts.

Working in developing countries and within a conflict area provided multiple learnings regarding logistics, communications, and coordination of stakeholders, particularly while providing training under demanding circumstances in Yemen. This presentation discusses the main challenges encountered, strategies used to overcome them, and insights gained for future projects in similar contexts.

The main points presented are:

1. Geopolitical complexity: Highlighting the challenges posed by navigating political tensions and conflicts in the Red Sea region, and how decisions made at high political levels affected operational efficiency.
2. Operational hurdles: Discussion of the logistical and operational challenges faced in supervising the equipment supply and commissioning and the theoretical and practical training of local Yemenis to respond to an environmental incident.
 - The bureaucracy and procedures to be followed for customs and clearance procedures are complex and numerous in Djibouti.
 - Once cleared by customs, delivery of equipment took time due to limited airport working hours, payment of fees, obtaining collection passes, and organization of airport workers, transport, and loading equipment.
 - Reception of equipment at the WFP facility was often delayed as the local agent did not make proper arrangements ahead of time for the offloading of equipment.
 - Training of local Yemenis was challenging due to in-country security issues.

3. Stakeholder engagement: Emphasizing the importance of building strong relationships with local stakeholders, particularly the Director of Operations (customs) to help expedite customs clearances and WFP personnel important for delivery/reception of equipment.
4. Learnings: Key takeaways and insights gained from our experience, focusing on adaptive strategies, effective communication, and the importance of adaptability in dynamic environments.
 - Close and regular coordination with UNDP OSR and logistics personnel enabled our team to identify priorities daily and address emerging issues.
 - All equipment-related activities (inspections, maintenance) were documented using a data collection tool. A detailed workflow was followed, and the information compiled in a database with reports generated to share with UNDP representatives.
 - Using the incident command structure in Djibouti's National Contingency Plan would have facilitated communications with the authorities (customs, Ministry of Environment) and likely helped with numerous logistical aspects.
 - The implementation of an incident management structure would have been beneficial for the overall coordination, communication, and administration of this Project. The creation of a dedicated logistics team would have been helpful.
 - Due to the ongoing political tensions in the Red Sea region, it is important to continue the capacity-building of the Yemeni first responders to develop and strengthen their skills, procedures, and abilities concerning incident management.