

Interspill 2025 – Call for Papers

Category: Conference

Topic: Outreach and Communication

Subtopic: Partnerships and Collaborative Working (Regional cooperation)

Paper title: Evaluation and Comparison of National Contingency Plans in South America and Caribbean Region using RETOS

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Abstract:

This paper aims at providing a comparative analysis of national contingency plans of South America and Caribbean Region that could be impacted by offshore exploration & production and shipping activities.

Considering the recent growth of offshore production in Guiana and the increase of drilling operations in the north coast of Brazil and in Suriname, several concerns about the possibility of oil spills arouse. One major complexity is the need for transboundary coordination in the South Caribbean area, where island nations may be especially vulnerable to these events.

Beyond the common framework established by Cartagena Convention, countries can struggle to respond to unexpected spills, as recently seen in Tobago in February 2024. Moreover, national contingency plans (NCP) usually establish additional and specific guidelines which can make coordination more complex, since several agencies have distinct roles in the Governmental structures.

To assist contingency planning aimed at transboundary spills, NCPs of 12 countries from these regions were evaluated using RETOS, an analysis tool developed by ARPEL and aimed at assessing the development level of several aspects of emergency response and planning. From several categories (Incident Command System - ICS adoption, unified command organization, tier I and II national capabilities, chemical dispersion and in situ burning provisions, wildlife response preparedness and international logistics facilitation), the most critical and common aspects for transboundary response were identified.

An average score of 63/100 points was achieved, while the top and worst ones consisted in 91 and 35 respectively. The most common issues were correlated to:

- Uneven degree of ICS adoption between different agencies in a country and between countries;
- Poor or insufficient regulation for chemical dispersion, usually not presenting clear use criteria or pre-authorized areas;
- Absence regulation for in situ burning at sea;
- Lack of wildlife provisions, including database of specialized human resources and facilities for initial care and management of impacted animals;
- Lack of organized and public environmental sensitivities data;

- Lack of or insufficient emergency procedures to clear customs for response equipment;

From a general perspective, it was assessed that most of NCPs provide generic guidance or not enough detailed criteria for agencies and institutions to take decisions during response. For some countries, some accessory regulation exists but it was not properly referred in the plan or just available in local websites. Moreover, although it is highly probable that large spills generated in one country can impact its neighbors, very few NCPs indicate procedures on how to communicate or coordinate activities with international parties.

Finally, some possibilities were proposed as a suggestion on next steps to improve awareness of local regulators about the need to further develop NCPs. These mainly relate to the possibility of having mutual training and exercise and to adopt common regional frameworks considering computational resources and standards. As a good practice, the existing support provided by RAC-REMPETIC and other technical associations, as well as from the private and public sector of some more developed countries in the Caribbean region, could be coordinated to adopt a broader and periodically approach.