

Saving for a rainy day

Contact: stephan.hennig@mcga.gov.uk

–

Investing in stakeholder relationships for better preparedness and incident management

1. Incident management is challenging for all parties involved. An initial lack of reliable information and uncertainty of expectations create apprehension and oftentimes tensions which are not conducive to successful incident response and management. This applies both to administrations and to industry.
2. Enforced changes to incident response created by the global pandemic add further potential complications. Parties may not be able to meet in person, and remote contact via phone or video paradoxically creates additional distance between individuals and teams.
3. This distance needs to be overcome through positive engagement, clear communication, and trust. Trust is not easily gained and usually requires time to be established, and time is a commodity in short supply during emergency response situations.
4. How can all these challenges be addressed before they can develop an inadvertent detrimental effect on the incident response?
5. To enhance preparedness, all parties are encouraged to engage with the network of stakeholders they can expect to work with during incidents.
6. Administrations and industry alike should assess their stakeholder networks to determine which organisations they are required to cooperate with in accordance with their countries' laws and regulations.
7. Quite often, there are already existing links in place, and it should be assessed whether they are sufficient. Where no existing connections exist, new links should be established for the benefit of all parties.
8. This may either happen directly between individuals in government and industry organisations, or it could equally take place in international fora, or via national or international membership bodies (e.g., the International Chamber of Shipping or national trade associations).

9. Measures to help overcome some of the challenges of incident response can include joint training, joint incident debriefs, participation at conferences and workshops or Memoranda of Understanding. Furthermore, global membership bodies provide different levels of membership which can enable mutual understanding.
10. This session aims to showcase some examples of good co-operation and to encourage parties to establish good working relationships with stakeholders outside of incident response, so that when an incident calls for joint involvement, a degree of mutual understanding and trust already exists.
11. Some examples:
 - 1) Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs): the UK and the International Group of Protection and Indemnity Clubs (IGP&I) maintain a MoU which aims to promote cooperation between the parties and to facilitate a swift and effective response to major maritime casualties. This MoU encourages regular interactions between the parties which often takes the form of participation in exercises and workshops, joint and reciprocal presentations to respective organisations, and recently even a joint podcast. A significant number of incidents over the years have been made easier through previous cooperative working between the parties.
 - 2) Multi-organisation workshops/exercises: most recently the UK Department for Transport hosted an online workshop initiated jointly by the Port of London Authority and my office. The aim was to assess the impact of an ultra large container vessel incident in a major port with associated pollution and wreck removal. The workshop attracted participation from nearly 40 organisations ranging from shipping lines to government departments and trade industry bodies across the supply chain. This was not a one-off event but is part of an engagement process which aims to improve mutual understanding, and which encourages cooperative working to improve preparedness for incident response.
12. Attendance at conferences such as this one also provides valuable opportunities to make new connections and foster existing ones. Events like this can also provide a platform to demonstrate good practice in cooperation.
13. An example of this is joint case study presented to an international audience at a conference. It was delivered by representatives from a salvage company, a marine insurer, a government regulator, and me. The case study described how these,

and other parties responded to a salvage incident on the west coast of Scotland during the first national lockdown in the UK caused by the SARS-CoV-2.

The response to the grounding of a small cargo vessel would – under ordinary circumstances – have required a response cell involving all relevant parties to be convened close to the location of the incident. This could not be justified under the health emergency circumstances and all parties had to adapt to a changed way of responding.

Fortunately, the salvage and wider maritime industries are highly adaptive. Furthermore, most of the individuals involved on the incident management level already knew each other and had worked with one another on previous occasions. A good level of trust therefore already existed. This greatly assisted all parties in helping resolve the incident in the safest and least environmentally-damaging way possible.

Over the course of 43 days in 2020, only those directly involved in the salvage of the ship and of its cargo deployed to the scene. The response management was successfully conducted entirely remotely via direct communications or via conference call – an approach that would never have been seriously contemplated until circumstances forced everyone to consider working differently.

14. Was the incident response successful? Yes, it was. Will the response system now and in the future repeat this approach? Perhaps. Most maritime salvage incidents are variations on a small number of themes, even though every incident brings its unique challenges. The key to responding to these challenges lies in the preparedness and in the experience of those tasked with managing it. It is unlikely that the remote management would have been as smooth as it was, had the key participants not know each other beforehand. How did the parties know each other? By attending conferences and networking events, through previous incident responses, and by making an effort to know the individuals they would likely be working with during an incident.
15. In summary, it pays to invest time and effort in your stakeholders. The dividend you receive can mean the difference between a successful joint response and a very challenging atmosphere between responders in addition to the technically challenging circumstances of an incident.