

International Offers of Assistance – Guidelines for Enhancing Multi-Agency Response from the International Community

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ABSTRACT

Large or complex spill responses, at or beyond a Tier 3 response capability, require the affected nation to reach out beyond existing bilateral or multilateral agreements to multiple actors and agencies throughout the international oil spill community. The challenges for a national authority to adeptly manage the multiple differing, and at times competing, priorities of the numerous international agencies, response contractors, equipment manufacturers, regional coordinating bodies and others offering assistance can be significant. In order to help address these significant challenges with affectively coordinating these possibly multi-layered interactions, the Guidelines for International Offers of Assistance, developed by the International Maritime Organization, are intended to provide a comprehensive solution to large or complex spill responses that overwhelm a nation's existing capabilities, and those of its existing agreements. These guidelines promote the development of a thorough IOA system to manage the multiple agencies and organizations offering a variety of assistance, including equipment, resources and technical specialists, in an organized manner that helps ensure the responders in the field receive only those resources most critically needed to facilitate the response operations, to help promote effective and efficient response in a multi-agency landscape. This paper will provide an overview of these guidelines and recommendations for implementation within a nation's existing oil spill regime.

White Paper

ISSUE

Effective and efficient spill response typically involves smooth and productive interaction amongst multiple actors and agencies, in advance of and throughout the duration of a response. Even response authorities who are the “sole” agency or department charged with the responsibility to ensure that response is conducted appropriately, safely and to a reasonable and practicable conclusion must interact with and are accountable to other agencies, elected officials, stakeholders and the general public, as well as international neighbors and foreign and domestic private vendors and contractors who expect reasonable access to/ability to vie for a “market share” of the response.

CHALLENGES

One set particular set of challenges to ensuring effective interaction within this range of spill response partners includes how best to interact with International Partners – neighboring countries as well as foreign vendors and contractors whose concerns range from possible impacts on their environmental and economic well-being in addition to desiring to offer assistance (USDOS 2011). In particular, how does an affected country effectively manage a multitude of offers coming in from foreign governments, agencies, regional coordinating bodies, and private entities while simultaneously organizing and launching a process to solicit offers, to send out targeted specific requests for specific needed equipment and resources?

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

The IMO seeks to provide a possible solution to some of these challenges through the development of the Guidelines for International Offers of Assistance – a highly flexible and adaptable set of steps which can be taken by an affected nation during a large or complex response which requires support from other nations, regional organizations and private entities.

The impetus to develop international guidelines for assistance got a strong push after the ratification of OPRC90 (IMO 2014), which was the first attempt to “internationalize” spill response preparedness (Holt, 1993; Edwards 1993; Edwards 1995). The IMO started this process with the development in 2005 of the Annex to Resolution A.983(24), Guidelines for Facilitation of Response to a Pollution Incident (IMO 2005).

These steps are designed to allow a response authority/agency to set up an IOA management system:

- A system which allows for tracking of each offer solicited and each offer received.
- A system which establishes accountability for response to each offer, as well as follow through on each request made.
- A system which seeks to ensure that the needs of the response, specific to the tactics and strategies being implemented by those in the field managing the cleanup, are what drive those offers accepted and utilized in the response.
- A system which outlines key members in an effective IOA System, in particular the inclusion of the affected nation’s Foreign Ministry Department (i.e. Dept of State) and their role in the international diplomatic aspects of soliciting and accepting offers from foreign governments and entities.
- A system which outlines a range of key considerations which must be identified and adequately addressed during an IOA Process:

- Funding mechanisms
- Decision-making authorities on who can say Y/N to an offer/request
- Roles/responsibilities of key members: Response Authority/Agency; Foreign Ministry Department; Spiller; offering Agency/Entity; etc
- Ability to expedite customs and immigration process for intake of accepted offers
- Need to address applicable Liability and indemnity issues
- Assurance that the types and specifications of the equipment and resources on offer are accurate and that the equipment match the needs of the response and is in working order.

These IOA Guidelines identify 5 mechanisms between which the offers and requests would typically flow:

- 1 Government to Government;
- 2 Private sector to private sector;
- 3 Private sector to Government;
- 4 Private sector-through-Government to Government; and
- 5 Offers coordinated by Regional Organizations on behalf of governments

EQUIPMENT LEXICON

Another key component of the IMO IOA Guidelines was the development of a ground-breaking, innovative concept: an Equipment Lexicon – a generally accepted set of terminology for use during an IOA process that allows each entity involved in the process to use the same set of language and technical terminology (Parker et al, 2014). Use of common terminology captured in the Lexicon greatly minimizes confusion and “levels the playing field” for the range of entities involved in an IOA process – seasoned highly experienced technical experts as well as Foreign Ministry representatives with little or no oil spill experience.

An example of how the Lexicon could be used during an incident requiring an IOA process would be if the requesting nation needed boom. A representative working within the proposed IOA system, using the Lexicon tool, would first identify that Boom was needed, selecting “Boom” from column A “Equipment Type”, then next determine one of several Task Options provided in the Lexicon column B (for example: “Rivers and Canals”), and then select from Lexicon column C an Equipment Subtype Option (“Curtain Boom”). Next, using the next set of columns in the Lexicon tool, the representative would determine which Response Option the boom would be used for (“#1 Mechanical Recovery”, and then choose a Capability Option from column D (“15 to 46 cm”). By walking through this process and capturing this information, using the standard terminology from the Lexicon, into one of the Request forms, the affected nation making the request for assistance has a higher chance of obtaining exactly those resources needed to continue to support operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Effective coordination in a Multi-agency/multi-actor landscape starts with establishing a unified and clear understanding of authorities and responsibilities – outlined in the nation’s Contingency Plan, which outlines:

- Who is in charge (i.e. which agency/authority?)
- Who has decision making authorities for which aspects of a response? Who has the decision to say Y/N to an IOA offer?

- What are the roles/ responsibilities of the Spiller?
- What are the funding mechanisms for the various equipment and resources that will be required?
- Which level of government/Spiller organization will handle which aspect of the IOA process?

Another key component to the establishing and maintaining effective coordination in a multi-agency landscape/arena is the adoption/promulgation of an overall response management system, such as ICS, which is flexible and adaptable (i.e. can expand/contract with the spill needs/changes)

Both of these concepts follow into the concept of horizontal and vertical Integration. The response authority/agency must effectively know how to coordinate across agency/department/ministry lines within its nation, to effectively integrate each one's authorities and responsibilities. Once they are working harmoniously, they can then effectively support the field responders, and also work together to integrate with foreign governments, agencies, Regional Coordinating Bodies, and private entities to mount and maintain a sustainable, efficient IOA process – which delivers on the needed equipment and resources to the field responders to aid the response objectives.

The past has helped fashion the future - lessons learned from the Deepwater Horizon incident triggered this program and have been addressed by this multinational task force to create Guidelines to hopefully ensure a more coordinated and effective response should future needs arise.

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