



**LESSONS LEARNT OF SYCOPOL FROM THE RESPONSE OPERATIONS
FOLLOWING THE ERIKA WRECK**

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ABSTRACT

Following the wreck of the ERIKA in December 1999, the companies of SYCOPOL (French Oil Spill Control Association) went to site as soon as the oil slick hit the coast and tried to minimize the damage caused by the pollution. Over two years after it appears essential to make share their lessons learnt from the response operations. To intervene on a marine pollution it's firstly to be available and operational in a very short time, but it's also to fit always the strong constraints of the marine environment and the many participants of the POLMAR plans. That's why reactivity and adaptation have been the essential assets of the SYCOPOL companies.

The cleaning techniques implemented, specific to the marine environment, and the essential preparation of the cleaning sites guaranteed the intervention quality, the worker security and the respect of the environment. To clean up the shoreline it's also working in a constraining, changing and living environment: the marine environment. The weather conditions, the action of the swell, the coastal currents and more particularly the tide, also raised essential problems to the work site organization as well as the cleaning techniques. The close collaboration with the experts enabled the companies to adapt the techniques and the cleaning limits in order to minimize the shoreline erosion.

In addition to the natural environment it is necessary to evoke the general context. Considering the origin of the disaster, the political and tourist constraints imposed on the companies could be understood and required an other form of adaptation. It appeared essential indeed to take into account the economic stake which made difficult the logic in the cleaning operations, exclusively based on technical criteria.

Since December 1999, the administrations concerned have been looking into the many problems raised during the wreck of the Erika. Today many changes of the POLMAR plans turn towards a better management of marine pollution. The specialized companies of the SYCOPOL, have also wondered about improvements



to increase the efficiency of the response operations. The Erika wreck have shown the importance of the complementarity between state participants and specialized companies. Let us benefit from the assets and the lessons learned from each one to improve the fight against marine pollution and to work together on the response operations.

