



RETOUR D'EXPÉRIENCE DE L'ERIKA

Mr Joël L'Her – Centre d'Études Techniques Maritimes et Fluviales (CETMEF)

Joel.lher@equipement.gouv.fr

Secondary authors : Mrs Monique Floch and Nathalie Metzler

ABSTRACT

Several reports about the disaster of the Erika and about the implementation of the Polmar-Terre contingency plans highlighted deficiencies in the management of the crisis and particularly:

- the delay in updating the POLMAR-terre plans, that led to relaunch the steps of revision and to launch the dynamics through the interministerial circular of the POLMAR plans.
- the low number of POLMAR exercises and the lack of coast-sea interface
- the lack of reflection on the logistics of waste storage from the beach to the final reprocessing plant
- the unsuitability of some response equipment for this kind of pollution

Since the disaster, several experiences have made it possible to identify well the lacks and to suggest actions to improve the preparedness and the response against oil spills. Particularly, since March 2000, the Directorate of Harbours, Maritime Transport and the Littoral organised days of reflection in the Erika experience, involving all managers in charge of implementing contingency plans related to the accident of the Erika. At this opportunity, several facts were established and actions were launched. The goal of the present intervention is to remember the main conclusions of these experiences and to account for what has been engaged for 2 years.



1. The preparedness to the response

Contrary to what could be said, the preparedness to the response against the oil spills had not been forgotten and even knew some progress before the disaster:

- The updating of the POLMAR-terre plans had been relaunched: a guide of revision had been produced in 1998 and a pilot POLMAR-terre plan had been worked out in the department of Manche.
- About 3 anti-pollution exercises had been carried out per year.

However, the goal was the bringing up to date of all the plans and the accomplishment of 5 exercises per year.

The experiences showed several kinds of progress:

- to allow for 3 additional parts in the plans: communication, clean-up sites, sanitary appendix
- to detail well the respective functions of the communities and of the state
- to improve the sea-coast link
- to associate the financial units to the exercises

2. The risk assessment and the notification

On this point, the remarks were about the reliability of the information concerning the oil drift and about the necessity of arbitration between departments for the distribution of response equipment.

3. The carrying out of the progress

The carrying out of the response showed that there were difficulties in:

- Taking into account the orders to the POLMAR stockpiles
- the deployment of equipment
- the mobilization of the staff



- the storage and disposal of waste
- the re-stocking of the equipment and of the products

4. The management in long run

The response against an oil spill, and particularly like that of the Erika must last. The structures and the organizations are not prepared and their procedures are not adapted. Particularly, it is necessary to improve or to detail:

- the level of involvement of the state services in the response
- the relations with the skilled workers
- the management of the voluntaries
- sanitary

5. Financial matters

The financial difficulties that appeared during the Erika casualty are numerous (travel expenses, staff compensation, rules of competition and delays...) but are tackled only for the record for this present report.

6. The co-ordination during response

The pollution response requires several levels of co-ordination that could be improved:

- The coast-sea connection
- The interdepartmental co-operation
- The partnership between all public entities involved

The new interministerial circular brings important precisions to this subject.



7. The response means

With reference to the Erika spill, an assessment mission was entrusted to Pierre MONADIER from "Le Conseil Général des Ponts et Chaussées" about the adaptation of the POLMAR stockpiles and about their way of management. On the base of these first conclusions, an exceptional programme of purchasing of equipment was launched and should be finished at the end of this year. This programme comes to complete the regular renewal of the stocks.

Conclusions

The actions of the state in the response on the coast against the oil spill take the bad functionings remarked for the response against the pollution of the Erika wreckage into account and also the improvements that were suggested during the different reflection rounds on the experience. Progresses were accomplished, however, it is sure that the more important progress to carry out in the coast conservation against oil spills will not come from response but from prevention.

