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**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT  
(EUR-OPA)**

**Meeting of the working group  
“Role of local and regional authorities in major hazard management”**

**11-12 June 2009  
PARIS, Council of Europe Office (Room 2), 55 avenue Kleber**

***Objectives pursued***

*Organised by l'Institut Supérieur de Planification d'Urgence [Higher Institute of Emergency Planning]  
(ISPU), Belgium*



## Overview

### Summing-up of the meeting on 4 and 5 December 2008

On 4 and 5 December last year, a workshop on “Role of local and regional authorities in major hazard management” brought together the persons who had taken part in the survey conducted by questionnaire (Algeria, Armenia, Belgium, France, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Greece). The aim of the workshop was firstly to provide a summary of the analysis for each participating country and secondly to consider the best way of using the information already available, the need to explore certain aspects in greater depth, and the advisability of extending the analysis to other countries. After introducing their papers with a description of their country’s specific administrative context and explaining the role of local and regional authorities in major hazard management, the participants each went on to describe two commonly encountered problems and two examples of best practice that might be of use to others.

Papers for the following countries are available: Algeria, Belgium, France and Greece’s PowerPoint presentation. They will be appended to the comparative analysis to be published by the Agreement. The other participants were invited by e mail to forward, if they so wished, their contribution to the following address: [alexandra.sonck@ibz.fgov.be](mailto:alexandra.sonck@ibz.fgov.be). The meeting report were sent by e mail to all participants on 4 March 2009.

### Making existing material available

At the meeting in December, the working group members agreed on the best way of making use of the 2008 survey results. It was decided to make existing material available rather than enlarge the working group. A document comprising the various contributions was accordingly produced, entitled: “*Role of local and regional authorities in major hazard management: 2008 survey results*”. This document should enable us to identify more readily practices which have advantages over others. After the June meeting, the document will be supplemented for each country with three chapters:

- The administrative context in which the local and regional authorities’ role is placed;
- Local and regional authorities’ role in each phase of the major hazards management cycle;
- The advantages or good practices<sup>1</sup> and the difficulties specific to each system.

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<sup>1</sup> Group members are advised to exchange good practices which they have identified by means of the comparative tool according to the layout of the appended ISPU good practice schedules.

Unfortunately, perusal of this document immediately reveals a more sketchy analysis for certain participating countries. A letter had been sent to the group members in 2008 so as to clarify some of the replies but did not elicit any further information. Members of the group willing to do so may still add to the document until June. It will then be published by the Agreement.

#### New contributions

The Cypriot Civil Defence has sent the ISPU its completed questionnaire.

#### **Working group meeting on 11 and 12 June 2009**

Since the December meeting dealt with the phases of preparation and management, the group's next meeting will concern awareness of major hazards and prevention at local level. It will take place in Paris on 11 and 12 June 2009.

Group members are invited, in that connection, to prepare a paper on the actions conducted by local and regional authorities with regard to awareness and prevention of major hazards (Chap.1), the difficulties encountered (Chap.2) and good practices that might be of use to others (Chap.3).

To ensure that the structure of our papers is about the same, a passage has been taken from the analysis APCAT(2007)11. This excerpt recalls firstly what is meant by "awareness" and "prevention", and also contains some principles intended to provide waymarks in a very wide subject area. Avenues of reflection are then suggested for identifying best practice. In that respect, some good practices identified by us in your country will be sent to you shortly for validation.

#### Awareness of major hazards

*"Risk awareness comprises several features:*

- ***Identifying the potential hazards.*** *This involves gathering all the historical data on past disasters and on material elements, such as the situation of industrial estates, the hazardous substances used there, the prevailing winds, the path and flow of watercourses, etc. It should be pointed out that some risks are not specific. For example, as far as the transport of hazardous products is concerned, the areas exposed to the technological risk are dispersed and are located close to the transport networks.*

- **Analysing the characteristics of the hazards** in order to understand their nature, assess the likelihood of their occurring and describe how they spread and develop. If you understand a phenomenon, you can anticipate when it might occur and what the possible consequences will be. Effective prevention and preparation measures are essential. In view of the uncertainties, the emphasis needs to be placed on the vulnerability of the assets at risk.

- **Identifying the exposed assets.** This involves identifying the persons, assets and key services found in the area exposed. The public authority must, for example, single out buildings that are either particularly vulnerable (schools, hospitals, prisons, nuclear power stations, industrial complexes, etc) or important because of their role in a rescue operation (fire stations, airports, etc).

- **Analysing the vulnerability of the exposed assets.** This involves forecasting the predictable consequences of the event on the exposed assets, taking account of the ageing of the population, people with restricted mobility, the resistance of buildings, etc. Apart from the predictable consequences, there are hundreds of possible scenarios that can reduce or worsen the impact, depending on factors that cause the impact of the event to vary, such as the time it occurs (holiday period, day/night), the wind direction and strength, the weather, etc.

Risk awareness enables urban sprawl to be directed towards less exposed areas and is essential when it comes to taking effective prevention and preparation measures. Moreover, risk management and post-event rehabilitation are directly related to this. This knowledge must therefore be expanded continuously, and it must go beyond the physical characteristics of the hazards and extend to an analysis of vulnerability, which increases all the time and makes the risks too complex for them to be understood through experience feedback alone.

There must be as broad a consensus as possible between the state and the local and regional authorities with regard to their respective roles:

- **Local and regional authorities** are better placed than any others to produce a risk assessment because they know more about the history and geography of the area. However, they often have insufficient resources at their disposal for this. As their technical, economic and legal resources are limited, they are not always able to obtain information from the operators of hazardous enterprises on the risks that their activities entail. This information could be obtained at different stages: when the plant is built by making the permit to run it conditional on the presentation of an overall safety study; at the prevention stage (industrial accidents, major accidents); or at the emergency planning stage, by obliging the operators to

*draw up an internal emergency plan that takes account not only of the risks within the company but also the impact of external risks on it.*

- - *Following the same process, the **state** identifies and analyses the major hazards that might affect the entire area as well as the goods and services it delivers. It can produce or commission risk assessments and conclude co-operation agreements with other states or international organisations. It brings about and encourages partner-led initiatives from various sectors and promotes the setting up of associations that work in this area by providing them with financial or technical support. Exchanges of views with local and regional authorities should make it possible for a historical and geographical knowledge of events to be shared.”*

Thus the local level enjoys the advantages of proximity (familiarity with the conditions on the ground and historical knowledge) but the national level has at its disposal more resources and a more extensive network of experts. How can pooling of information between the different administrative levels be improved?

Dialogue should be encouraged and all available expertise summoned to assist, at every level (international, national, local and regional authorities, enterprises, universities...).

#### Some avenues:

- Collaboration with industrialists;
- Inventory, organised at all administrative levels, of major hazards awareness;
- Delivery by the central authorities to local and regional authorities of a methodology for analysing major hazards;
- Mapping of the hazards present over the entire territory to be carried out and used in common
- ...

#### Prevention

*“The term prevention covers all activities aimed at avoiding the risk becoming a reality. It includes spatial planning, the development of defences, combating environmental degradation, monitoring risks, and preventive information.”*

As can be seen, prevention concerns numerous fields, among which there is very often insufficient interaction, alas. It is nonetheless important to know the limits of the actions conducted by way of prevention in order to curb the effects of the hazard should it eventuate.

Some avenues:

- Information on and consideration of major hazards in spatial planning and development schemes in order to reduce housing or siting of new industries in risk-prone zones;
- Assess the exposure to seismic risk of particularly important structures (schools, hospitals, fire stations, places receiving the public, industries using dangerous substances, nuclear power plants, dams, ...);
- Make earthquake-resistant building standards compulsory in zones subject to seismic risk;
- Establish a perimeter of compulsory deforestation around exposed assets in order to reduce their exposure to risk of forest fires;
- Make owners of dwellings for sale or rent provide information on the hazards affecting them;
- Arrange for meetings bringing together, at each level, all services dealing with prevention. If appropriate, register their capabilities for action in plans;
- Encourage scientific support to local authorities in order to improve evaluation of the threat, surveillance, alert and rapid response;
- Require industrialists to take suitable measures to guard against any major accident or limit its effects both on and off the site. In this connection, they must also take into account the impact of an external risk in order to obviate or mitigate the domino effect;
- Organise consultation with the authorities in charge of preparedness;
- The various methods devised at local level to make residents care about major hazards? Every opportunity must be taken to convey information: general information transmitted by the media, information evenings and handing out leaflets, meeting with residents of risk-prone areas, etc. Education for prevention of risks may also be prescribed in school curricula;
- ...

Group members are invited to send their papers if possible to [alexandra.sonck@ibz.fgov.be](mailto:alexandra.sonck@ibz.fgov.be) by **1 June 2009**. The papers will help us structure the first day's proceedings of our meeting. The second day will be given over more to a discussion of best practice.