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the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

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Draft Workplan of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents for 2017–2018

Note by the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents

Summary

The Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (Joint Expert Group) is a joint group under the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). At its fourteenth meeting (Stockholm, 3 May 2016), the Joint Expert Group discussed possible activities that could be undertaken in the biennium 2017–2018. Following the discussion, this document was prepared which contains the proposed workplan for the Joint Expert Group for 2017–2018, as agreed with its co-Chairs and the Bureau of the Industrial Accidents Convention. In accordance with the Joint Expert Group Strategy of 2009 both Bureau need to decide on the activation of the Joint Expert Group and its workplan, in consultation with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management for the Water Convention.¹ The Working Group is invited to review and comment the workplan and encourage nomination of appropriate experts.

¹ Available from: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/teia/water/JEG/Strategy_JEG.pdf.

I. Workplan for the biennium 2017–2018

1. The following activities are envisaged by the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (Joint Expert Group) in the biennium 2017–2018, with the understanding that Parties would provide expertise and lead country support, including financial support, to support their implementation:

1. Development of a measure catalogue or guidance for fire-water retention

2. On 1 November 1986, one of the worst environmental disasters with transboundary effects in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region took place in Basel, Switzerland: The Sandoz accident led to the drainage of a large volume of firefighting water into the Rhine River where it created a toxic plume of 70 kilometres, flowing through Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Thirty years after the accident, operators still face challenges regarding fire protection and the containment of fire waters to prevent water pollution of transboundary rivers, especially at processing plants. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Sandoz accident, a seminar on this topic was organized (Bonn, Germany, 8–9 November 2011), supported by the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.² One of the recommendations from the seminar, attended by representatives from Parties to both Conventions, was to task the Joint Expert Group, overseen by the Bureaux of the two Conventions, with the elaboration of a catalogue of preventive measures for processing plants, with special attention to handling fire waters at these plants. To respond to Parties' needs, the Joint Expert Group could develop such a measure catalogue or guidance for fire water retention in the biennium 2017–2018.

[Lead countries: Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Switzerland (tbc)]

2. Promotion of transboundary response exercises

3. The promotion of response exercises, in particular in the transboundary context, is of utmost importance to be able to effectively prepare for and respond to industrial accidents, especially those that might cause transboundary water pollution. To this end, the Joint Expert Group members could further promote the organization of transboundary response exercises, for example, by participating in and facilitating workshops, seminars or webinars on lessons learned from such exercises, relevant international forums and conferences. In the period 2017–2018, the Joint Expert Group members could facilitate and participate in the following two transboundary exercises, to which related seminars would be held back-to-back:

(a) A transboundary field exercise between Germany and Poland on the Oder River, with a back-to-back seminar on prevention strategies at hazardous installations for fire protection (related to the development of the above guidance on fire water retention);

[Lead: Oder Commission, Germany, Poland (tbc)]

² More information on the seminar is available at www.unece.org/index.php?id=25376.

(b) A transboundary field exercise in the Danube River Basin, with a back-to-back seminar on contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters.

[Lead: Hungary, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (tbc)]

3. Supporting the application of UNECE safety guidelines and checklists in countries with economies in transition and interested United Nations Member States beyond the UNECE region

4. Countries with economies in transition often face challenges in implementing the provisions of the Conventions. The Joint Expert Group could provide assistance to such countries with regard to accidental water pollution, mainly by supporting them in the application of the principles and recommendations in guidance materials produced previously by the Joint Expert Group and within the framework of the Conventions, including the checklist for contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters (2015) and the safety guidelines and good practices for oil terminals (2014), tailings management facilities (2008) and pipelines (2006). These guidance materials will be promoted at workshops and events organized by others, as appropriate and feasible. In the period 2017–2018, this could be achieved by, among others, providing support to the implementation of two projects, led by Germany, on improving the safety of tailings management facilities in Georgia and raising knowledge on tailings safety at universities in Ukraine.

[Lead country: Germany]
