

Cooperation beyond borders, a Canadian response organisation perspective

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Eastern Canada waterways are a major navigational entry to Canada, a long journey of over 2 200 nautical miles from St-John's, N.F. the farther eastern port in Canada to Thunder Bay, Ontario at the western limit of the Great Lakes. Ships will navigate through the water of the Gulf of St-Lawrence, the St-Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. And to do so, they have to demonstrate that they have a response capacity in case of an oil spill.

Oil spill response – Canadian regime

The actual response regime was established twenty years ago, at the beginning of the '90s.

Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) is the lead agency and has to assure that, following an oil spill, the responsible party (RP) will implement an appropriate response.

The Canadian Shipping Act is regulating the spill response regime for the area south of 60°. The response capacity available for response has to be funded and supplied by the private sector and has to meet defined planning standards, based on risk areas and spill scenarios. Ten major ports, including a surrounding zone of 50 miles, were identified as Primary Area of Response (PAR) and 4 other straits were classified as Enhanced Area of Response. To assure a proper response capability against those standards, the industry established 4 Response Organisations (RO) in Canada.

ECRC~SIMEC

ECRC~SIMEC is a certified RO. Its Geographical Area of Response includes all the navigable waters, south of 60°, from 200 miles offshore East going West to the border of British Columbia, excluding the PAR of St-John, New Brunswick and Point Tupper, Nova Scotia.

Members can meet the regulated requirement regarding the response capability preparedness by signing an agreement with ECRC~SIMEC.

When a spill happens, the Responsible Party (RP) has to mount the appropriate response, according to the situation. If and when activated, ECRC~SIMEC will provide "spill response services" to the On-Scene Commander, which could include a plan of action, equipment, resources and operational management for the oil spill clean-up effort. ECRC~SIMEC does not only provide equipment, but can also provide operational

management, based on an ICS approach. The RP will be responsible for all the cost incurred by ECRC~SIMEC.

Preparedness costs for ECRC~SIMEC are paid by all the members, through a fixed fee for the vessels (750\$/year) and on a fee per ton for the Oil Handling Facilities, the Bulk Oil Cargo Fee (Actual fee is 12.9 cents/ ton for the Quebec region).

ECRC~SIMEC maintains 6 Response Centres (RC), each one having the specialised spill response equipment required to meet the 18 hours / 2 500 ton planning standard: boats, booms, skimmers, storage barges, pumps, communication equipment, etc. The majority of the equipment is road transportable and, if needed, will be cascaded with the trained operators when responding to a spill in a different region.

Forty-seven permanent ECRC~SIMEC employees are involved in the preparedness activities: developing / maintaining response plans and strategies, maintaining response equipment ready, training responders, etc. During a response, they will form the core of the Spill Management Team, supplemented by Mutual Aid partners and advisors.

Every RC has to maintain a workforce of trained responders, through a network of sub-contractors, in order to implement the response strategies and deploy related equipment identified in the plan or needed at the time of the incident.

That response capacity is tested through exercises monitored by Transport Canada for certification purposes and was confirmed by responding to over 300 spills over the last 20 years.

Cooperation beyond borders

Excluding the North Pole area (!), Canada has only one neighbouring country, USA.

But over the years, when developing ECRC~SIMEC and during our day-to-day business, we faced many other barriers and had to cross “borders” to build a strong RO and an efficient Canadian Response regime.

Canada – USA borders

A Canada – USA Joint Marine Pollution Contingency Plan is in place to help manage marine pollution incidents in contiguous waters.

CCG regional directors and USCG District Commanders have developed bilateral supplements for their respective regions, e.g. CANUSLAK for the Great Lakes region.

The purpose of the plan is to provide a coordinated system for planning, preparedness and response, based on the use of the private sector resources augmented by public resources, if needed. It should ensure that a coordinated planning will be done at the local level, and the transboundary movement of response resources will be facilitated at the time of the spill.

Plans are tested throughout international exercises held on a regular basis.

Other barriers or borders

When implementing the regime 20 years ago, one of the objectives was to increase and improve the response capacity in Canada. To achieve this objective, we had to make sure we were building on actual strength, reinforcing what was working well, and filling gaps, sometime having to cross barriers, to cross perceived borders!

Local barriers

The core of our response workforce is based on “industrial cleaning contractors” working typically in refineries, on vessels in shipyard or at dock, cleaning tanks and also responding to tank truck accident or small spills from ships.

Another source of responders is the maritime industry: tug companies, ship services companies, small local cruise companies, fishermen, etc.

Working for ECRC~SIMEC during a spill response has to be a positive experience and not being perceived as losing a business opportunity. Being trained (and paid) for on water spill response increases their autonomy and expertise for smaller spills they could respond to; working on bigger spills, supplying personnel, equipment and services, being paid quickly also helped building strong relationship over the years and overcoming some initial barriers.

Volunteers want to be part of the solution. They have to understand they need to work under a coordinated structure to be efficient and prevent injuries to themselves and others. Working in the Wildlife group or for a Shoreline clean-up contractor is well accepted.

Regionally

Cooperation with other RO, the CCG or other governmental agencies is essential, but sometimes barriers may have to be overcome.

Mutual aid agreements are in place between the four RO in Canada to share personnel, equipment and other resources in case of a major spill. Working under a similar management system helps during a response and facilitates integration of resources.

CCG have spill response equipment; reallocating those equipment to remote areas or outside of the PAR, where the risk are lower but response time by the RO will be longer was another part of the strategy to improve the global response capability in Canada.

Building on the strength and expertise of different agencies and organisations is another key to overall success. SCAT process is in use in Canada for more than 20 years. Environment Canada and ECRC~SIMEC shared the development of it and promoted its use during spill responses. By doing so, we helped establishing a core group of specialists in Canada who were involved in different spill responses around the world.

A similar approach was done for the wildlife response, involving Environment Canada / Canadian Wildlife Services and ECRC~SIMEC.

Global Response Network

Seven industry funded OSRO's form the Global Response Network, sharing knowledge and best practices. Seven operational teams (OT) have been formed, covering different

topics; each OT has identified resources, both technical expertise and equipment, which could be available during a major response.

Cooperation beyond borders

Building on our strength and sharing with other organisations proved to be successful.

In 2005, ECRC~SIMEC was involved in a response following a major train derailment. We had to implement the full SCAT process mobilizing our personnel and some of our technical advisors (SCAT specialist, SCAT leaders, mapping specialist, data management specialist, etc.). In 2010, following the Macondo incident, SCAT process was implemented on a very large territory for a long duration. ECRC~SIMEC personnel and some of our advisors were called in to support our US colleagues. We soon realized that almost half of the SCAT group was composed of Canadian personnel!

Responding in ice conditions is something we have to face from time to time. Training and sharing operational expertise is key to success. Since now close to ten years, through the GRN, we are holding practical workshops involving personnel from many OSRO's. We are presently holding three «one week» training sessions in Montreal, involving personnel from Alaska, Canada, USA, England, Greenland, Norway and Singapore. If we have to respond to a significant spill in ice somewhere, it will sure help sharing personnel.

A Joint Contingency plan is in place between Canada and USA to respond to a spill involving our two countries.

However, opening barriers, sharing and working with other organisations in a preparedness mode is key to success and will help responding to a major spill outside our borders, understanding that there will always be some limitations to share equipment and personnel, a response capability having to be maintained in Canada!