

Prevention and Preparedness in the United Kingdom

Toby Stone

The UK has been unfortunate in experiencing three of the top twenty oil spills in the world. It is thus well rehearsed in dealing with such disasters. However, each incident brings its particular problems. There are always lessons to be learnt.

Major reports after these incidents include Safer Ships Cleaner Seas and more recently Lord Donaldson's review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control. This review has dramatically altered the way the UK responds to maritime casualties.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency are the national competent authority for the Oil Pollution Preparedness Response and Co-operation Convention (OPRC). OPRC in the UK is well established. The key to preparedness includes some 170 ports and harbours to have approved OPRC Oil Spill Contingency Plans. These ports are considered to be the highest risk. In addition several hundred Offshore Plans have also been approved encompassing Oil and Gas Exploration, Development and Production.

All of these OPRC plans dovetail with the National Contingency plan for the UK. To support the OPRC concept the UK has full accreditation schemes for the Responders, the Trainers, and the Port and Offshore Installation Operators. The British Oil Spill Control Association and the Nautical Institute, on behalf of the MCA, administer these schemes.

Local and regional resources are required to be in place under OPRC legislation for the 170 ports and harbours and all offshore installations. These resources compliment the national, Government maintained stockpiles during major incidents.

The UK is presently developing UK legislation in advance of the HNS protocol to OPRC. Future contingency planning will encompass not just crude oil and refined petroleum products but all forms of marine pollution at local, regional and national levels.

The UK has already experienced some potentially serious HNS incidents, including the MultiTank Ascania, Ever Decent and levoli Sun. The HNS protocol is the missing link.