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MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
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Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda

PREVENTION OF ACCIDENTAL WATER POLLUTION

**Progress Report of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group
on Water and Industrial Accidents**

Prepared by the Co-Chairpersons of the Joint Expert Group in cooperation with the
Conventions' secretariats

INTRODUCTION

1. The present document summarizes the key results of the work undertaken by the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents since 2000.
2. During this time the Joint Expert Group held seven meetings as follows: 18-19 October 2001 in Berlin; 15-16 April 2002 in Budapest; 4 July 2002 in Geneva, 30-31 October 2003 in

Kaliningrad; 26 October 2004 in Budapest; 16 December 2005 and 10-11 April 2006 in Geneva. The minutes of all meetings are available at <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/water.htm>. This report is being submitted to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) as well as to the fourth meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

I. BACKGROUND

3. Major industrial accidents may cause far-reaching transboundary effects and may lead to accidental water pollution. Therefore, the Signatories to the Industrial Accidents Convention and the Parties to the Water Convention decided to cooperate on issues related to the prevention of accidental pollution of transboundary waters.

4. As a result of this cooperation, the Workshop on the Prevention of Chemical Accidents and Limitation of Their Impact on Transboundary Waters was held in Berlin (7-9 May 1998). Taking into account the results of this workshop, the seventh meeting of the Signatories to the Industrial Accidents Convention (13-15 May 1998) proposed that a Joint Expert Group be established under both Conventions. This proposal was endorsed by the first meeting of the Working Group on Water Management, established under the Water Convention, in July 1998. The Joint Expert Group prepared the Seminar on the Prevention of Chemical Accidents and the Limitation of Their Impact on Transboundary Waters (Hamburg, 4-6 October 1999). The conclusions and recommendations of this seminar were then adopted at the second Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, held in The Hague (23-25 March 2000), and endorsed by the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention, held in Brussels (22-24 November 2000).

5. The Parties to both Conventions extended the mandate of the Joint Expert Group to support and provide guidance in the implementation of the above recommendations and agreed on the Group's future workplan as contained in decision 2000/5 on the prevention of accidental water pollution, taken by the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention (ECE/CP.TEIA/2, annex VI).

6. The Joint Expert Group reported on the progress in implementing its workplan to the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention, at its second meeting in 2002 (see progress report – CP.TEIA/2002/11) and at its third meeting in 2004 (see report on the meeting – ECE.CP.TEIA/12, paras. 46-51). It also reported to the Parties to the Water Convention at their second and third meetings (see reports ECE/MP.WAT/5, paras 28-30 and ECE/MP.WAT/15, para. 39).

II. MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

7. The Joint Expert Group drew up a report on the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the Hamburg seminar (ECE/CP.TEIA/2006/10 – ECE/MP.WAT/2006/9) on the basis of replies to a questionnaire received from countries of Central and Western Europe.

The report is submitted for consideration and subsequent adoption to the governing bodies of the two Conventions.

8. An inventory of existing safety guidelines and best practices for the prevention of accidental transboundary water pollution was developed and made available at <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/water.htm> by the secretariats of the two Conventions. The aim was to create an information platform concerning guidelines for the prevention of accidental water pollution. According to the decision of the Joint Expert Group, the inventory has the following sections:

- (a) UNECE regional safety guidelines (e.g. recommendations of the Hamburg seminar);
- (b) Safety guidelines adopted by international river commissions (e.g. joint bodies for the Elbe, Danube and Rhine Rivers);
- (c) Safety guidelines adopted by bilateral bodies; and
- (d) National safety guidelines and/or technical standards.

9. The Joint Expert Group provided the input for levels (i) and (ii) of the inventory. At the Group's request, focal points under the two Conventions provided information concerning levels (iii) and (iv). This process should be considered an ongoing one and all countries are welcome to provide further relevant information in order to make the inventory even more meaningful.

10. The Joint Expert Group was kept informed, provided guidance and promoted bilateral and multilateral projects to assist countries with economies in transition in introducing safety measures for hazardous activities, with a special emphasis on the prevention of accidental water pollution.

11. To properly address the safety of pipelines, the Joint Expert Group established a steering group, which drew up the Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Pipelines (ECE/CP.TEIA/2006/11 – ECE/MP.WAT/2006/8). In doing so, the steering group took into account, among others, the input provided by authorities, pipeline operators, research institutions and non-governmental organizations at and as a follow up to the Workshops on the Prevention of Water Pollution due to Pipeline Accidents (Berlin on 8-9 June 2005); and the Prevention of Accidents of Gas Transmission Pipelines (The Hague on 8-9 March 2006).

12. The Joint Expert Group also began work to draw up guidelines and good practices for tailing dams. A workshop is foreseen in order to seek the necessary input from all stakeholders.

13. The Joint Expert Group agreed to tackle the issues concerning guidelines and good practices for navigation of ships on rivers after completing the task concerning tailing dams and after considering the work done in this area by other actors.

14. The Joint Expert Group considered that adequate response measures to industrial accidents often depend on the effectiveness of early warning and alarm systems. It stressed that the UNECE Industrial Accident Notification System and river alarm systems should be as effective as possible and operational at all times. The Group also agreed that there is a room for further cooperation between the network of points of contact under the UNECE Industrial Accident Notification System and the focal points of river alarm systems as well as for integrating early warning with automatic water monitoring stations.

III. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

15. The Joint Expert Group, at its seventh meeting in Geneva on 10-11 April 2006, reviewed the tasks in its current workplan. It considered the tasks, that had been accomplished, those that needed further work and finally those that require on-going attention from the Group. It also considered new proposals suggested by the Group's members. Based on the above review and discussion of priorities, the Joint Expert Group agreed to include the following elements in its draft workplan for consideration and subsequent adoption by the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention:

(a) Provision of guidance and assistance to countries with economies in transition in the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the Hamburg seminar;

(b) Drawing up of guidelines and good practices for tailing dams;

(c) Facilitation of the exchange of information on the functioning of alarm and notification systems at the national, regional and local levels established within the framework of the two Conventions and/or international river commissions (e.g. Rhine, Elbe and Danube) through: (i) joint consultations of representatives of points of contact designated under the UNECE Industrial Accident Notification System and river alarm systems and (ii) integration of monitoring and assessment systems and early warning systems in transboundary rivers;

(d) Provision of guidance for establishing cross-border contingency plans;

(e) Promotion of the organization of response exercises, in particular in the transboundary context;

(f) Drawing up of guidelines and good practices for the navigation of ships on rivers;

(g) Maintenance and updating of existing safety guidelines and good practices for the prevention of accidental transboundary water pollution and provision of guidance on their adaptation to specific needs and circumstances in river basins;

(h) Development of methodologies to identify hazardous activities that handle smaller amounts of substances than those specified in annex I to the Industrial Accidents Convention.

16. The Chairpersons of the governing bodies of the two Conventions at their consultative meeting in Geneva on 25 April 2006 (see minutes of the meeting – COPB18/16 May 2006) supported the above workplan.

17. The Joint Expert Group also suggested that its meetings should be held at such intervals as to ensure the achievement of results expected by both governing bodies. They should preferably be held in different UNECE member countries represented in the Group on a rotation basis.

18. The Joint Expert Group should be entrusted to decide on the methods of work most suitable to accomplish the tasks listed in paragraph 15. It is expected to report the results of its work to the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention and to the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF THE JOINT EXPERT GROUP

19. The Joint Expert Group has the potential to substantially support the work carried out within the framework of the Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions. It can become an important forum for the exchange of information on issues related to the prevention of accidental pollution of transboundary waters. However, for this to happen, several conditions would have to be met:

(a) The Joint Expert Group has to receive equal and firm support from the governing bodies of both Conventions. The work done by the Group should be demand driven and the demand should come from both forums.

(b) Experts representing some countries with economies in transition require support for their participation in the work of the Group. Financial support should be secured by joint efforts and contributions from the Parties to the Conventions.

(c) Participation of experts should be enhanced; more UNECE countries should be represented and actively participating in the Group's work; in particular, the participation of experts representing the Water Convention should be enhanced. All UNECE countries, in particular Parties to the Conventions, are encouraged to nominate experts to participate in and contribute to the work of the Joint Expert Group.