

Strategic Plan of Action. Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR). March 2010.

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Strategic Plan of Action

Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and
Response Working Group (EPPR)

March 2010

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 as a high level forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Since that time a number of working groups have been created under the umbrella of the Arctic Council.

1.2 Context

The mandate of the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR) is to deal with the prevention, preparedness and response to environmental emergencies in the Arctic. EPPR is not an operational response organization. Members of the Working Group exchange information on best practices and conduct projects to include development of guidance and risk assessment methodologies, response exercises and training. The EPPR Work Group mandate is refined biennially through Ministerial Declarations and is further shaped by guidance from Senior Arctic Officials. The goal of the EPPR Working Group is to contribute to the protection of the Arctic environment from the threat or impact that may result from an accidental release of pollutants or radionuclides. In addition, the Working Group considers questions related to the consequences of natural disasters.

The Arctic is an environmentally sensitive area with an extreme climate characterized by low temperatures, winter-time darkness, snow, ice and permafrost. These harsh conditions and the lack of infrastructure in much of the Arctic create a higher vulnerability to emergencies than in more temperate climates. Actions for prevention, preparedness and response must be adapted to the conditions and remoteness of the Arctic. Accordingly, international co-operation in this area is of major importance.

2. Vision

The EPPR Working Group's vision provides the basic building blocks for the Strategic Plan.

The EPPR Working Group is an expert forum designed to:

- Plan and prepare for response to accidents;
- Develop strategies and tasks to prevent accidents;
- Enhance best practices; and
- Focus on the environmental implications of emergencies involving oil, hazardous and noxious substances (HNS), radioactive substances, and natural disasters in the Arctic.

3. Guiding Principles

The work of the EPPR working group is based on the following guiding principles:

3.1 The involvement of Arctic inhabitants.

Involvement of indigenous and local people in emergency prevention, preparedness and response is of critical importance. Arctic inhabitants, because of their proximity to the activities that pose risks of emergencies in the Arctic, are likely to be most affected by an accident and could provide first response until regional and national resources can be delivered if required. In addition, Arctic inhabitants may participate in response actions and contribute their traditional knowledge to the process. The EPPR Working Group recognizes the importance of involving Arctic inhabitants, and seeks their involvement in its work.

3.2 Building on the initiatives of others.

In order to increase effectiveness and minimize duplication, the EPPR Working Group takes advantage of the work of other groups and organizations and reciprocates where possible. EPPR cooperates with other Arctic Council Working Groups, the Northern Forum and other relevant organizations to address the Arctic perspective in emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

3.3 Sharing and exchange of information.

Information exchanges on practices, experiences and technology developments within the EPPR Working Group are an important avenue that can lead to improvements in national and multinational systems designed to protect the Arctic's environment and its inhabitants. The sharing of approaches, potential and existing problem areas and lessons learned strengthen prevention, preparedness and response capabilities of the Arctic countries.

3.4 Communication with relevant organizations.

The EPPR Working Group recognizes the importance of providing information to and communicating with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and the emergency management communities on Arctic emergency prevention, preparedness and response. EPPR has undertaken projects focused on public information and communication and will continue to address the need to provide accurate and timely information regarding emergency planning, preparedness and response.

3.5 Cooperation with industry.

Industries in the Arctic have expressed interest in closer cooperation between industry and the Arctic Council working groups. The EPPR Working Group and industry have a common interest of cooperation. This could be related to project cooperation but also to sharing resources, information and data.

4. The Strategic Plan Framework

The framework consists of four objectives and strategic priorities on which the Work Plan is based and in some instances represents a continuation of ongoing activities. The Work Plan is an independent document, separate from the Strategic Plan.

Objective 1: Information sharing

Rationale:

The Arctic countries have knowledge of different types of technology and have the ability to function in a cold climate with snow and ice. The industries and the activities in the Arctic areas are adjusted to the harsh conditions of the Arctic with its very low temperatures, winter-time darkness, snow and permafrost. The harsh conditions and the lack of existing infrastructure in much of the Arctic make emergencies more problematic than in more temperate climates. Actions for prevention and preparedness must be adapted to the harsh conditions and remoteness of the Arctic. Research is being done at universities and at industrial and governmental research centres to further develop this knowledge. International cooperation in this area is of major importance to accelerate programs; maximize resources, and find solutions to common problems.

Initiatives:

Research and Development

The EPPR Working Group actively supports domestic and international research initiatives and work designed to develop and improve best practices. The EPPR Working Group also promotes the exchange of technology concerning preventive measures in environmental emergencies in the Arctic.

The EPPR Working Group engages in developing environmental impact assessment of preventive and response actions. The Arctic environment has a low tolerance for disturbance. Therefore, the impacts of actions in the Arctic need to be very carefully assessed and the actions adjusted to the prevailing conditions. Traditional knowledge should be applied to understanding the possible consequences of predicted impacts and in reducing uncertainties.

Objective 2: Improve prevention measures aimed at reducing accidents which could result in environmental emergencies in the Arctic.

Rationale:

It is a generally accepted principle that preventive measures are of great importance. The highest priority for the environmental protection of the Arctic is to increase prevention measures and thereby reduce accidents.

Initiatives:

Risk Analysis

For the development of emergency prevention, preparedness, and response actions in the Arctic, an important first step is the Environmental Risk Analysis of Arctic Activities.

The EPPR Working Group produced a report on potential risks in the Arctic, including the identification of high risk activities. This report, which will be kept up to date by the EPPR Working Group, provides the basis for future activities including mitigation of the highest risks.

The different reports produced by other Arctic Council Working Groups (e.g. Oil and Gas Assessment, Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment, etc.) are and will continue to be important in describing risk in the Arctic and continued cooperation with these working groups is essential. EPPR supports specific activities and products of other Work Groups and this engagement contributes to the development of the EPPR agenda.

Objective 3: Improve emergency preparedness programmes at local, national, regional and international levels to ensure they are commensurate with the level of risk that exists, including arrangements for mutual assistance.

Rationale:

If the preventative measure fails, it is of great importance that sufficient response capacity is in place on national, regional and local levels to protect the unique Arctic ecosystem and its inhabitants. Contingency plans to deal with emergencies such as safety of life and protection of the environment from natural and man-made disasters, should be in place, response resources available and the people involved should be adequately trained.

Initiatives:

Infrastructure

For preparedness and response operations, it is critical to know what resources are required and the extent of their availability and also the resources at risk. Therefore, the identification of infrastructure requirements and pre-placement of response assets and resources at risk in the Arctic area are essential and should be developed further with the inclusion of traditional knowledge and with involvement of indigenous people. The use of spatial information will be of great importance. Based on experience from training and exercises, the EPPR Working Group will contribute to the identification of related strategic tactics and techniques.

Guides

The guides and guidelines prepared by EPPR Working Group are useful tools in emergency prevention, preparedness and response work. The Working Group ensures that manuals, guides, brochures and other documents it produces address a need; are clearly written; formatted for ease of use by the people working within the areas in question; and when possible, translated into relevant languages.

Exercises and Lessons Learned

EPPR member countries conduct and participate internally as well as between member countries in training and exercises based on current activities and events in order to identify and share best practices and lessons learned. Information from actual situations is also gathered and disseminated. To facilitate information sharing, standard EPPR templates for prevention, preparedness, and response documentation will be developed where appropriate.

Objective 4: Improve response capabilities so that they are commensurate with existing threats.

Rationale:

Emergency response capacity is highly dependent upon a nation's ability to provide human and physical resources over geographic distances in various seasonal and climatic circumstances. The current lack of infrastructure in all but a limited number of areas, coupled with the vastness, and harsh environment makes carrying out a response significantly more difficult in the Arctic.

Initiatives:

Capacity building

To maximize the application of research and development, active exchange of knowledge among the Arctic Council countries in the form of educational material, technology, and training and exercises programmes is essential. Exchanging information and cooperating on emergency response training material and training programmes through exercises, courses, conferences and other methods furthers capacity building among the partners. The participation of local and indigenous peoples in the exchange of knowledge and information is very important in achieving successful results.

International agreements and arrangements

There are several international agreements which involve the activities of the EPPR Working Group. These are, inter alia, the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC Convention) and its Protocol on Preparedness, Response and Co-operation to Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances, 2000 (HNS Protocol), the 1992 Civil Liability Convention, the 1992 Fund Convention, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Convention on Industrial Accidents, the IAEA Conventions on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency, International Convention on Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and many bilateral agreements and arrangements between the Arctic countries. EPPR will undertake a review and study of existing agreements to evaluate overlaps and gaps.

Notification and communication during incidents

Notification and communication among the Arctic countries during incidents are very important and there are existing international systems dealing with these requirements. International systems for notification exist for marine, industrial and nuclear emergencies.

At this point in time, the EPPR Working Group will not develop a new system for notification and communication in the Arctic but will build on the existing systems.

Public awareness

In all work done in the Arctic area, it is vital that the people living there are taken into account. In the identification of emergency response assets, risk assessments and response actions, the involvement of local and indigenous people should be increased. The increase of public awareness and of public participation is invaluable for emergency prevention, preparedness and response actions.

The EPPR Working Group communication strategy is developed and updated in co-operation with the other working groups and the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council to ensure consistency and to avoid redundancy and to increase overall response capacity and capability.