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BACKGROUND PAPER: 2nd Functional Exercise of the MOSPA Agreement

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Background paper



## BACKGROUND PAPER: 2<sup>nd</sup> Functional Exercise of the MOSPA Agreement

**Background:** Increased commercial maritime activity in the Arctic region elevates the risk of maritime incidents as well as the need to plan and prepare for responses. Representatives from the eight Arctic states work within various forums and working groups to mitigate risks and ensure safe, secure and environmentally responsible activities in the Arctic. EPPR specifically addresses the areas of Marine Environmental Response (MER) and Search and Rescue (SAR) for the Arctic marine environment. EPPR is heavily engaged in the development of Arctic response protocols, shared technologies and executing pollution response exercises while drawing representation from the preparedness and response authorities across the eight Arctic nations. EPPR focuses its efforts on providing support in the development of protocols and procedures for mitigating environmental threats in the Arctic. Examples include the development of the Field Guide for Oil Spill Response in Arctic Waters (1997), currently undergoing an update, and the Guide to Oil Spill Response in Snow and Ice Conditions in the Arctic (2015) to increase proficiency amongst Arctic nations' response to oil spills in the marine environment. In addition, EPPR is currently working on a Response Viability Analysis to analyze response equipment and environmental challenges when responding to oil spills in the Arctic marine environment.

**EPPR MOSPA Agreement:** EPPR focuses much of its attention on exercising the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (*MOSPA Agreement*). The objective of the *MOSPA Agreement* is to strengthen cooperation, coordination and mutual assistance among the Parties on oil pollution preparedness and response in the Arctic in order to protect the marine environment from pollution by oil. Efforts include the development of Operational Guidelines (Appendix IV of the *MOSPA Agreement*) that designate notification and request (and offer) for assistance protocols in the event of an incident requiring multi-lateral coordination. EPPR works to exercise and maintain the *MOSPA Agreement* by ensuring that the eight Arctic nations remain engaged in multi-lateral discussions, including an annual exercise specific to the *MOSPA Agreement*. The first exercise under the *MOSPA Agreement* was hosted by Canada in 2014, consisting of a communications exercise that simulated the notification of parties and the request for and receipt of offers of assistance.

In September 2015, the U.S. hosted the next phase of the EPPR *MOSPA Agreement* exercise cycle, a workshop held at U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters. This workshop focused on identification of the highest risk Arctic spill scenarios, a review of lessons learned from the 2014 Canadian led exercise, as well as updating the *MOSPA Agreement* and Operational Guidelines (*Guidelines*). In addition, the group began planning for the 2016 EPPR MOSPA Agreement exercise planning process, a table-top exercise hosted on the margins of the 2016 EPPR I meeting.

**EPPR Connectivity Test:** As part of the annual update to the *Guidelines*, EPPR representatives determined that a "Connectivity Test" would assist with the validation (and updating) of the contact information (email, phone, and fax) as listed in the *Guidelines*. During the EPPR II meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland (December 2015), this "Connectivity Test" was incorporated into the 2016 EPPR MOSPA Agreement exercise objectives and was agreed by EPPR as a necessary annual validation process. The U.S. Coast Guard led the Connectivity Test, conducted from January 11-22, 2016, by contacting all eight Arctic member states' administrative and operational contacts as listed in the *Guidelines*. The test was considered a success, because while some issues were identified with reaching certain points of contact, these issues are now being resolved by the EPPR exercise design team so that changes can be implemented into future updates of the *Guidelines*.

**2016 EPPR MOSPA Agreement Exercise:** In December 2015, representatives of the EPPR exercise design team met in Reykjavik, Iceland where the objectives and scenario for the June 2016 EPPR MOSPA Agreement table-top exercise were presented and approved by EPPR. By utilizing a tanker collision scenario based in Norway, EPPR will be able to further test the updated notification protocols, increase complexity of international request-for-support activities, and incorporate use of a common operating picture platform that can be shared across the Arctic states. The three stage exercise will begin with a standard notification with requests for assistance, followed by each state analyzing their internal protocols for offering assistance. Finally, in June 2016, the EPPR exercise design team will meet on the margins of the 2016 EPPR I meeting to discuss the results of the request and offers of assistance, as well as each state's internal protocols for providing such assistance. Further improvements to the *Guidelines* should be expected once the EPPR exercise design team makes their final recommendations to EPPR.