

To: Meeting of Senior Arctic Officials

From: EPPR working group

Date: September 20, 2013

Updated EPPR Strategic Plan of Action for approval

Background

EPPR's Operating Guidelines states that the main objectives and priorities for the work of EPPR working group shall normally be included in the "Strategic Plan of Action" which is approved by the SAOs.

Below you will find the text of EPPR's Strategic Plan of Action which was approved by EPPR in the meeting in Oulu, Finland 3. – 4. of June 2013.

EPPR's Strategic Plan of Action

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 mandate is refined biennially through Ministerial Declarations and is further shaped by guidance from Senior Arctic Officials. The goal of the EPPR is to contribute to the protection of the Arctic environment from the threat or impact from an accidental release of pollutants or radionuclides. In addition, EPPR 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

EPPR strives to be the premier international forum for the mitigation of risks to the Arctic environment from catastrophic occurrences, whether man-made or natural.

3. Guiding Principles

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

3.1 *The involvement of Arctic inhabitants*

Involvement of indigenous and other Arctic inhabitants 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 may provide the first response before any regional and national resources, if required, can be delivered. In addition, Arctic inhabitants may participate in response actions and contribute their traditional knowledge to the process. EPPR recognizes the importance of involving Arctic inhabitants, and seeks their involvement in its work.

3.2 *Leveraging the initiatives of others*

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

3.3 *Communication with relevant organizations*

EPPR recognizes the importance of providing information to and communicating with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and 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 prevention, preparedness and response.

3.4 *Cooperation with industry*

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

4. The Strategic Plan Framework

Objective 1: Define the risk of potential environmental emergencies due to commercial activities, nuclear/radiological material, and natural disasters in the Arctic

In order to determine the level of preventative and response measures required to reduce risk to an acceptable level, a quantitative determination of the level of risk due to each type of commercial Arctic activity, use of nuclear/radiological material or plausible natural disaster in the Arctic is required. EPPR encourages projects that measure the vulnerability of elements of the Arctic environment to, and the threat from, these events.

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

Prevention measures are the most effective way to reduce the risk from environmental disasters in the Arctic, given the paucity of response capacity, infrastructure and manpower available. EPPR conducts projects and consults with Arctic nation governmental agencies, other Arctic Council Working Groups, industry and other international organizations to determine the best practices for preventing accidents resulting in environment emergencies due to commercial activity or nuclear/radiological material in the Arctic.

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

If preventative measures fail, it is of great importance that sufficient response capacity (and antecedent preparedness measures) is in place on local, national and regional levels to protect Arctic inhabitants and the unique ecosystem. Contingency plans to deal with emergencies should be in place, resources available and the people involved should be adequately trained. EPPR encourages projects that enhance emergency preparedness and response.

Objective 4: Information sharing

Cooperation between Arctic constituencies (inhabitants, industries and governments) is critical to reducing the risk of environmental emergencies in the Arctic. The different national Arctic populations have both knowledge of different types of technology and the ability to function in the challenging Arctic climate. The industries in the Arctic have adjusted to the harsh conditions characterized by very low temperatures, winter-time darkness, snow and permafrost, and have created or adapted technological solutions to these conditions. Research is being done at universities, governmental research centres and other research facilities to expand the Arctic knowledge base. International cooperation and communication of lessons learned/best practices among these three communities is vital to create programs, maximize resources, and find solutions to common problems. Through its project work, EPPR endeavors to create and improve paths of communication between Arctic communities of interest.

Action requested

Senior Arctic Officials are requested to approve EPPR's Strategic Plan of Action.