

Learning experiences from voluntary sector: case Balex Delta

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Pollution Preparedness and Response Capacity in the Baltic Sea

- The coastal countries of the Baltic Sea and the EU (European Maritime Safety Agency, EMSA) maintain and develop a high level of pollution preparedness and response capacity in the region.
- This includes naturally acquiring and maintaining the needed equipment, but also agreed regional procedures, which are trained in joint annual operational exercises.
- Due to the sensitivity of the Baltic Sea, the focus is on ensuring sufficient mechanical recovery capacity at sea, instead of using dispersants (chemical products).
- In addition to such capacity at sea, the countries have developed joint response co-operation on the shore.

The BALEX DELTA Exercises

- The BALEX DELTA exercises have been held every year since 1989.
- The aim of the exercise is to check and improve the operational capacity and skills of the Baltic Sea countries to respond to maritime incidents affecting the waters of HELCOM countries.



Photo: The Kymenlaakso Rescue Department

The BALEX DELTA Exercise 2021

- The BALEX DELTA 2021 exercise was held in Kotka, Finland, on 24-25th of August 2021.
- The exercise was organized by The Finnish Border Guard.
- The Finnish Navy and the Rescue Department, as well as other Finnish authorities related to environmental response at sea and on the shore took part in the exercise.
- EMSA contributed with the agency's Oil Spill Response Vessel (OSRV) Norden, the vessel's onboard Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) and additional pollution response equipment from the EMSA Equipment Assistance Service (EAS).

The Exercise Scenario

- Two tankers collide in The Gulf Of Finland, resulting in oil and hazardous materials being released into the sea.
- The exercise included participants and resources from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Sweden.



Photo: The Kymenlaakso Rescue Department

NGOs at the BALEX DELTA Exercise 2021

- NGOs participating the exercise were coordinated by The Finnish Voluntary Rescue Service network.
- NGO part of the exercise consisted of four different locations: management centre, shore cleaning exercise at the “pool”, bird cleaning unit and reconnaissance exercise on the islands.



Photo: Heta Hyvärinen / Finnish Red Cross

NGOs at the BALEX DELTA Exercise 2021

- WWF Finland planned and organized all the “pool”, bird hospital and reconnaissance activities.
- Management centre, first aid service, first aid training and radiophone training were organized by The Finnish Red Cross.



Photo: Heta Hyvärinen / Finnish Red Cross

Learning experiences of NGOs 1/3

- Introductions of the participating organizations and their roles & capacities are needed early enough BEFORE starting to plan the exercise – do NOT assume that everyone already knows each other and therefore rush to the topic
- Coordination of the planning sessions should be organized by the main organizer of the exercise (authority) to make sure that all the communication reaches the right persons both before and during the exercise
- Formulate the aims of the exercise together! The more clear they are, the easier is to measure the success. Different sectors can have different, but compatible, aims.

Learning experiences of NGOs 2/3

- Make a list of your needs & budget for the exercise in advance.
- Negotiate early enough what costs will be covered by the organizers and what costs by NGOs and/or the volunteers themselves.
- Be prepared for the rough weather conditions: inform the participants what to bring and put up a tent for lunch break and/or first aid or other exercises in case of rain.
- Create and go through the exercise, communication and safety plan together with the authorities in advance.
- When explaining the tasks to the participants, make sure that they understood by asking. Never assume!

Learning experiences of NGOs 3/3

- If one of the aims of the exercise is to learn how to manage volunteers together, the representative of NGOs (voluntary manager) should have access to the management centre of the authorities (this worked well in Vellamo exercise) or vice versa
- The establishment centre and management centre (can be separated) for volunteers need a suitable place
- Accommodation and food service cannot be too far in order to avoid wasting time and money on transportations
- Create something to do while waiting: first aid training was an extra activity for this purpose and was a success!



Photo: Joonas Brandt / Finnish Red Cross

Thank you!