

Emergency Response Services

Providing emergency response services to requesting countries and organizations

www.eecentre.org

What environmental emergency response services are available?

As part of the humanitarian response to environmental emergencies, which include industrial/technological accidents and the environmental impacts of natural disasters and complex emergencies, technical and scientific support is often required to provide specific assessments and advise national authorities on how to effectively respond.

Countries affected by these types of emergencies can call upon the JEU for the following services:

1. Rapid environmental assessments to identify the risks and impacts of large scale, technological, human-induced and/or sudden onset natural disasters so as to prevent unnecessary loss of life and resultant damage. Trained and experienced environmental experts use a dedicated methodology to screen the affected area for industrial facilities, large hydro dams, port facilities and hazard waste sites requiring immediate action. This general assessment can identify any technical expertise and/or response required.



2. Onsite sampling and analysis of air, water, soil, hazardous and toxic substances to provide immediate and expert recommendations (see below). Independent and impartial sampling and analysis can identify the toxicity of spilled hazardous material, and the level of pollution in groundwater and soil. The onsite sampling and analysis can also be used to determine safe evacuation distances and mitigation measures to protect the affected population and first responders.



3. Technical expert deployments serve to carry out two to three week detailed assessments. The experts work with national counterparts to provide appropriate and practical recommendations on a number of specialised issues, including chemical spills, dam breaches, waste management, damage to infrastructure and geo-hazards. Outcomes of these technical expert missions often serve as the foundation or input to an overall humanitarian response strategy.



4. Preparedness can effectively reduce the impact of an environmental emergency. National authorities can increase their capacity to respond to these types of emergencies by learning from similar cases, as well as working with experts to assess the potential risks and threats, establishing and acting upon effective contingency plans and adopting recommended guidelines. Specialised trainings, simulations and dedicated exercises reduce the effects on the local population, build resilience and in turn reduce the reliance on international assistance. All services and training related to preparedness can be found on the Environmental Emergencies Centre (www.eecentre.org).

CASE STUDY

Nigeria Lead Pollution and Acute Poisoning Crisis

In March 2010, an unusually high number of deaths, primarily among children under the age of five in two northern states of Nigeria, were reported to state health authorities by Médecins sans Frontières. The cause of death was acute lead poisoning; one of the largest cases ever reported.

Following a request for assistance from the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health, technical experts were deployed on a sampling and analysis mission to support the authorities in attempting to determine the extent of the problem, with a particular focus on possibly polluted groundwater and drinking wells. The mission analysed lead levels in the soil and water, and mercury levels in the air.



One of the main findings was that the well and groundwater were not polluted, and could thus continue to be used as a potable water source. The mission results were used by the authorities to prioritise their response activities, including the medical treatment of the poisoned victims.

Cost

All emergency response services are provided through the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit at no cost to the affected country.

How to request assistance

National authorities can request assistance through the following channels:

- OCHA Country or Regional Office
- UNDP and The United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (in-country)
- OCHA Emergency Duty System: +41 22 917 20 10 or +41 79 203 7611
- OCHA Emergency Fax: +41 22 917 0748

“Environmental emergency services effectively identify and address environmental impacts of disasters, such as industrial accidents, chemical spills, dam breaches, and forest fires, as part of our overall response to humanitarian crises.”

*Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator*

Version 2
January 2013



Joint UNEP / OCHA Environment Unit (JEU)

The JEU assists requesting countries in preparing for, responding to, and strengthening resilience against environmental emergencies.

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