

EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ASEAN-OIL SPILL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION

TADASHI SHIMURA

Nippon Maritime Center, 16 Raffles Quay, #27-03 Hong Leong Building, Singapore 048581

Following the adoption of the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC), ASEAN countries formulated the Oil Spill Response Action Plan (OSRAP) in 1992 to enhance the capability of respective countries in combating large-scale or transboundary oil spills. Japan, as one of major beneficiaries of the Southeast Asian Seas, responded to these efforts by providing oil spill equipment such as oil booms, oil skimmers, oil dispersant etc. and established a dedicated network system to the member countries. The countries include Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore and The Kingdom of Thailand.. With a total defrayal of JY 1 billion (US\$9 million) from Japan's maritime community, this co-operative project called OSPAR, which stands for project on Oil Spill Preparedness and Response, is widely regarded as a good example of a regional emergency oil pollution combating system.

After some ten years of implementation, OSPAR turned out to have both strong and weak points. It surely made the action plans workable and the equipments were effectively used in actual oil spill incidents, but some of the shortcomings that were identified are in the aspect of scope and membership of the OSPAR. The OSPAR project was mainly focused on oil spills, considering that there are more chemical and product tankers passing this area. Recently, ASEAN countries include Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. With these developments, the six original OSPAR countries and Japan decided in May 2002 to extend its membership to the new ASEAN countries and expanded the scope of OSPAR to include hazardous & noxious substance (HNS) spills. More importantly, to strengthen regional co-operation and further enhance country's capability in combating oil and HNS spill incidents, member countries are determined to set up a network of relevant officials. Each country appoints a contact person from the leading agency and tasked to keep close contact with other countries' focal persons through email and homepage linkage.

Japan's role has also shifted from the provision of equipments to human resource development, and it now provides oil and HNS spill exercises, helps in formulation of contingency plans and other institutional arrangements for countries in the ASEAN region, including Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam.

As economies of this area are expected to grow at a rapid pace and vessel traffic will grow accordingly, the potential for serious accident becomes higher. Oil and chemical complexes already surround the Gulf of Thailand. While OSPAR is not directly aimed at solving issues relative to enclosed coastal seas, I believe that efforts to be made by member countries under OSPAR should contribute to the wider Gulf of Thailand as well.