
11. OILED WILDLIFE RESPONSE

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

General principles of good practice with regards to oiled wildlife response include but are not limited to the following:

- Ensuring health and safety of responders and general public are always first priority of response
- Objectives and strategy are clearly defined at the start of the response by being an organic part of pre-spill planning
- National legislation applies at all times
- Foreign response groups can only work under licence and supervision provided by national authorities
- Criteria and procedures for euthanasia and release, that are indicated also in the oiled wildlife response plan, are set by national authorities and can only be applied under their supervision
- Activities always aim at meeting highest standards of animal welfare. Rehabilitation is only conducted if adequate set up can be provided, with reasonable expectation of minimised suffering and maximised post-release survival of treated animals. Euthanasia is included as a mean of diminishing suffering and to replace rehabilitation where needed.
- It is clearly defined how the contributions (if any) of volunteers and volunteer groups will be integrated into the response activity, and how these contributions will be coordinated and controlled.

2. HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

Foreign groups and volunteers will have to comply with the standards for health and safety and environment (HSE) of the Requesting Party. These standards will be made available to invited groups in a communicable format, e.g. translated into English if possible. The adoption of a common set of HSE standards specifically for oiled wildlife response in the HELCOM region would truly facilitate the smooth integration of expertise from the region. The HSE issues connected with an oiled wildlife response are explained in the box below.

Towards HSE standards for oiled wildlife response in the HELCOM area

Oiled wildlife responders typically are facing two category of HSE issues while responding to oiled wildlife:

1. HSE issues related to working in an oil polluted environment
2. HSE issues related to working with oiled wildlife both in the field and in facilities

With regards to onshore wildlife response (the collection of live and dead animals), and the specific requirements for dealing with oil pollution, the general HSE standards of oil spill response will apply. This includes protocols and training with regards to

- the cautious behaviour in natural hazardous areas,
- the use of adequate personal protective equipment (ppe) when entering and working in polluted zones,
- minimising polluted waste and secondary pollution

With regards to dealing with live oiled animals, additional health and safety standards must apply. These include protocols and training with regards to 5 basic principles (IPIECA, 2004):

- the maintenance of safe working conditions and procedures
- the understanding of occupational health
- an understanding of potential hazards of working with oiled wildlife
- the wearing of adequate personal protective equipment (ppe)
- the practice of good personal hygiene

3. Banding and post release monitoring

An attempt to rehabilitate oiled animals should always be undertaken with the aim to release the cleaned and rehabilitated animals with a high probability that they will survive and reproduce as if they had never been oiled. The use of internationally recommended rehabilitation protocols provides a proper basis for this. Nevertheless, the ultimate evidence of the rehabilitation success must come from scientific observations that are made on the breeding colonies. Although the banding of successfully rehabilitated and released animals is part of international good practice, it is still hard to collect the necessary evidence from field observation programmes that released animals actually have rejoined their natural (breeding) population. Rings that are provided to the rehabilitated birds before their release cannot easily be read at sea or at breeding colonies. Therefore most registered readings come from dead seabirds that have washed ashore some time after their release. This tends to give an unfavourable bias to the perceived success rate of rehabilitation programmes.

The absence of evidence from breeding colonies does not disqualify rehabilitation as a useful approach in oiled wildlife response, but it is clear that more intensive research programmes are needed to allow better scientific assessment of post release survival in relation to rehabilitation methodologies. Possible roads for new research programmes in the field of oiled wildlife response include e.g. the use of colour rings or radiotags for rehabilitated birds, better scientific documentation of the development and use of rehabilitation methodologies and a more structural reporting of ring observations to rehabilitation centres. Especially larger incidents provide interesting opportunities for post-release studies. These should be integrated into the response plan, especially into the release protocols. In this way information on the survival of relatively large numbers of rehabilitated birds can be obtained.

HELCOM strongly recommends the banding or radio tagging of rehabilitated animals according to international standards and encourages research projects and stronger efforts to quantify and document post release survival of rehabilitated animals.

4. CUSTOMS AND BORDER CROSSING

With regards to wildlife response there are two main areas in which customs and border crossings need to be considered:

- The entrance of invited responders and/or equipment into a country
- The transport of oil affected animals across borders in order to have them rehabilitated in a neighbouring country

The first area is already covered by Chapter 4 and 8 of the HELCOM Response Manual.

The international transport of oil affected animals could be considered under the following circumstances:

- A relatively large incident has affected two or more neighbouring countries. In the coordinated international response the countries in question share their resources and the optimal use of these facilities may require that animals are transported to a facility abroad.
- A relatively small oil incident has affected a country with only limited facilities. It may be more cost-effective to send a limited number of animals to a permanent facility abroad instead of inviting foreign expertise and equipment into the country in question and set up a temporary facility.

The transport of marine animals normally needs a permit from both the countries in question. Such a permit could be facilitated by an enhanced procedure that can be followed as part of the national response plan and bi- and multilateral agreements between HELCOM countries that have been made in advance.

5. COMMAND STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Requesting Party provides a clear command structure for oiled wildlife response as an integrated part of the overall oil spill response command structure (see figures 1 and 2). Assisting Party will be informed about this structure and given a clear role and responsibility as part of that command system.

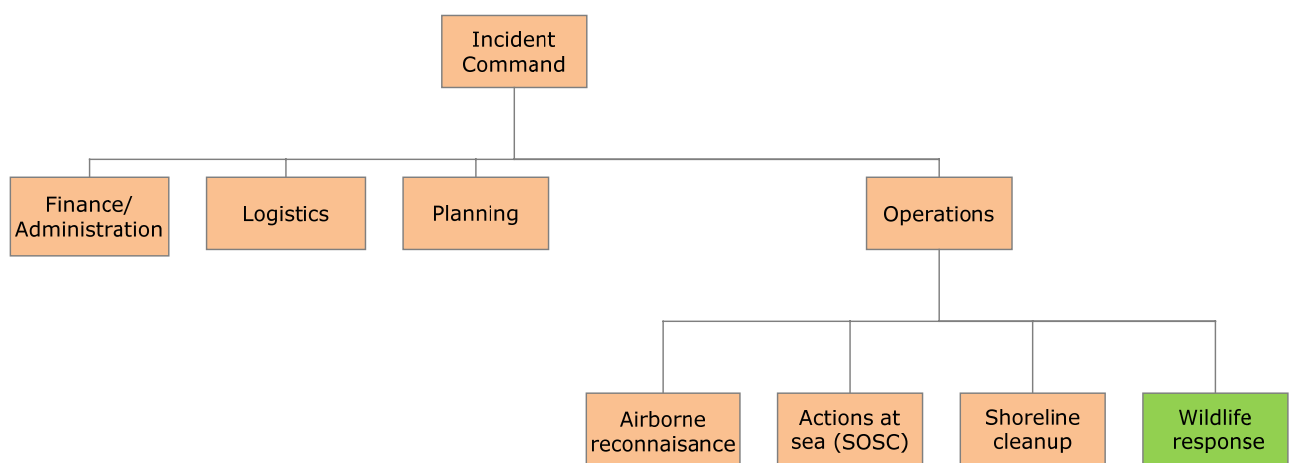


Figure 1: Wildlife response is often integrated into the overall incident command system as part of “Operations”, but the actual organisation structure will differ from country to country.

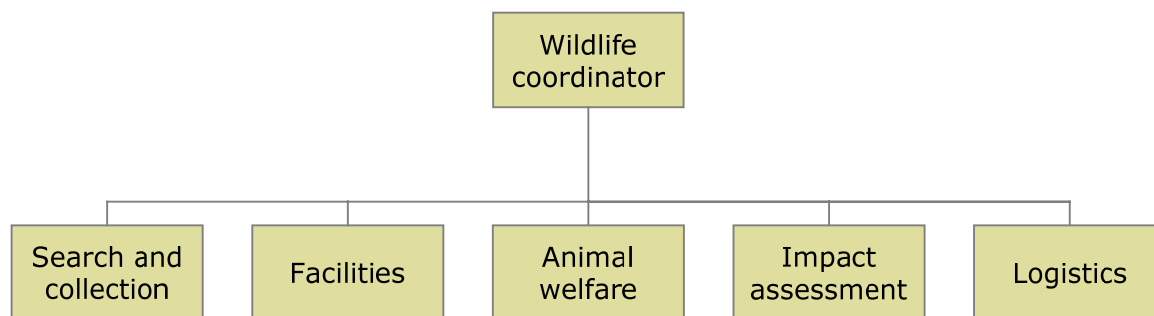


Figure 2: Example of a simple oiled wildlife response organisation chart. The contributions of foreign experts are often including the set up and running of a rehabilitation facility, impact assessment, search and collection, and/or management coaching. Groups or individual experts can be integrated into the organisation chart accordingly.

Assisting Party is expected to have its own command structure, including a mission leader with controlling power over the group. The Assisting Party will be asked to provide the names and the affiliation of the experts in the proposed team, as well as their internal command structure, the expertise they provide and their operational needs if integrated into the national response. The mission leader will liaise directly with the national wildlife response coordinator.

6. OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION WITH ASSISTING PARTY

Assisting Party will be kept informed at all times by a liaison officer who has a direct link into the national command structure and is mandated to deal with the foreign experts. Requesting Party provides all means feasible to maximise the contribution that the foreign experts could bring to the success of the national response. Requesting Party identifies a wildlife response centre (WRC) where all relevant information is brought together. Mission leader of Assisting Party will have access to this wildlife response centre and its information.

7. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The general rules for reimbursement of costs of assistance are included in Chapter 9 of the Manual.

Note: These rules will be applicable also to oiled wildlife response operations and no changes will be needed in the Manual in this respect if the legal basis of the Convention is extended to deal with oiled wildlife response (see section 3 on requesting and providing assistance).

The probability of a successful claim can be maximised if the wildlife response is carried out in organised and coordinated manner, following an agreed plan, involving trained expertise and applying proven methodologies and acknowledged protocols. The Contracting Parties are recommended to follow the IOPC Fund Claims Manual (pg 23) with regard to the claims of costs of oiled wildlife response.

8. EXERCISES

Oiled wildlife response exercising can be integrated, where applicable, as part of the existing HELCOM exercise structures described in Chapter 10 of the Manual (ALPHA, BRAVO, CHARLIE, DELTA, ECHO).

Additionally, each Contracting Party is encouraged to invite observers of the other Contracting Parties to participate in their national exercises.

Note: For that purpose no additional changes in the Manual are needed. HELCOM RESPONSE 10/2008 already recommended the Contracting Parties to include shoreline and oiled wildlife response in national and international response exercises.

9. INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES RELATED AND AVAILABLE

HELCOM Contracting Parties jointly recognize and agree on the use of the following guidelines and documents to be applied in preparedness and response in the HELCOM area:

- Guide to Oiled Wildlife Response Planning (IPIECA, 2004)¹
- Handbook on good practices for the rehabilitation of oiled birds in the aftermath of an oil spill incident (Anon. 2007)²
- Handbook on Wildlife Impact Assessment (Anon. 2007)
- **Handbook Impact Assessment Seabirds**³
- **A European Oiled Wildlife Response Plan**⁴
- IOPC Funds Claim Manual⁵
- Various internationally recommended wildlife rehabilitation protocols⁶

NB: Internationally promoted rehabilitation protocols are science-based and well documented procedures and methodologies that aim to restore an animal's capacity to survive and reproduce after release as if it had not been oiled at all.

Examples of oiled bird protocols that are widely accepted include:

- The Oiled Wildlife Care Network protocols
- The IBRRC/IFAW protocols
- Derivates from these protocols (e.g. the Handbook Oiled Wildlife, published in Australia)
- The SRRC Pieterburen protocols

¹ <http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/?q=node/243>

² <http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/files/Rehabilitation%20of%20Oiled%20Birds%20in%20the%20aftermath%20of%20an%20Oil%20Spill%20Incident%20-Handbook-2007.pdf>

³ <http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/?q=node/243>

⁴ <http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/?q=node/211>

⁵ downloadable from <http://www.iopcfunds.org/publications.htm>

⁶ The protocols mentioned are not downloadable, but often can be provided on request by the organisation that developed and owns it