



MEDIA RELEASE

Accidental Spills from Ships in the Baltic Sea Addressed in Final Conference

8 December 2011, Helsinki, Finland (HELCOM Information Services) – Needed measures to effectively respond to major shipping spills in the Baltic Sea are discussed today in the final conference of HELCOM projects in Helsinki, Finland. BRISK and BRISK-RU projects (www.brisk.helcom.fi) have assessed sub-regional risks of spills of oil and hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea, where 18 per cent more ship accidents were reported in 2010 compared to 2009.

As a basis, for the first time ever, an overall risk assessment of pollution caused by shipping accidents was carried out in the whole Baltic Sea area, where traffic is dense and transportation of oil have significantly increased in the recent years. The projects have identified possible ways to effectively reduce the risk of spills including their impact and damage to the environment. These measures are specific to each sub-region of the Baltic. The measures include upgrading equipment for containing and recovery of oil from the sea surface, including in bad visibility and from ice, and tools to reduce the risks such as carriage of electronic maps by all ships operating in the Baltic Sea.

The risk assessment model takes into account e.g. the existing risk reducing measures such as various ship reporting systems and routing measures, and a prognosis of future traffic. The major maps produced within the risk assessment, including the ship traffic mapping, modelled risk for en-route collisions, crossing collisions and groundings as well as mapping of sensitivity towards oil, are available on the project website.

BRISK/BRISK-RU projects cover all maritime areas of the Baltic Sea and focus on major spills, i.e. spills that require assistance from several neighbouring countries. The sub-regional approach is cost-efficient as countries can share their resources to build a common pool of response vessels and equipment sufficient for a given sub-region.

The projects are being conducted within the framework of the HELCOM Response Group to implement the national commitments under the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. All HELCOM countries participate in the projects, which are co-financed by EU's European Regional Development Fund of the Baltic Sea Region Programme (2.5 m EUR) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (200,000 EUR).

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Note to Editors:

The Baltic Sea today is one of the busiest seas in the world, accounting for around 9% of total cargo and 11% of oil transportation in world traffic. There are about 2,000 ships in the Baltic marine area at any given moment.

Although growing traffic is a positive sign of intensified cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and a prospering economy, it also makes potentially polluting shipping accidents more likely. Collisions and groundings have increased, and these days there are some 120-140 shipping accidents in the Baltic Sea area every year. Fortunately, most of the accidents in the Baltic do not cause notable pollution. Over the period 2000-2009, an average of 7% of all reported accidents resulted in some kind of pollution. However, even just one large-scale accident would seriously threaten the marine environment. Two of the five most serious accidents in the Baltic marine area have occurred since 2001 – involving “Baltic Carrier” in 2001 (2,700 tons of oil spilt), and “Fu Shan Hai” in 2003 (1,200 tons of oil spilt).

The [HELCOM Response Group](#) works to ensure swift national and international response to maritime pollution incidents and that in case of an accident the right equipment is available and routines are in place to respond immediately in cooperation with neighbouring states. The Group also coordinates the aerial surveillance of maritime shipping routes to provide a complete picture of sea-based pollution around the Baltic, and to help identify suspected polluters.

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The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, usually referred to as the [Helsinki Commission \(HELCOM\)](#), is an intergovernmental organization of the nine Baltic Sea coastal countries and the European Community working to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution and to ensure safety of navigation in the region.

HELCOM is the governing body of the ‘Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area’, more usually known as the Helsinki Convention.

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