

PRESS RELEASE

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Vessel Contracts Finalised

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The European Maritime Safety Agency has today finalised contracts to strengthen its pollution response coverage in the Atlantic and Mediterranean areas. UK ship owner James Fisher Everard will provide a pollution response arrangement based on a pool of three vessels normally trading between the UK and Ireland. Spanish company Mureloil will provide a pool of two vessels which operate in southern Spain. Maltese ship owner Tankship Management will add a vessel to the already established arrangement in the central Mediterranean Sea and Greek company Environmental Protection Engineering (EPE) will provide a vessel based in southern Greece. All vessels will be equipped during the first half of 2008 and will become operational as pollution response vessels by mid-2008.

"Now that we have this third set of vessels contracted, EMSA is in a much improved position to provide 'top-up' response vessels relatively quickly should pollution disasters occur in the future," said EMSA Executive Director Willem de Ruyter. "We now have a number of vessels, including back-ups, throughout the Baltic, Atlantic and Mediterranean areas. This means that the network is nearing completion. Next year, we will have to close any remaining loopholes, including the Black Sea. We are looking into the best way of doing this at the present time."

Background

Regulation 724/2004/EC gave EMSA the task of assisting EU/EEA Member States in their response to ship-sourced pollution within the Community. To date, the requirement has been satisfied by setting in place a network of pollution response vessels in the Baltic, Atlantic and Mediterranean areas following two rounds of calls for proposals. These all have the capability to carry out normal operations and to convert, at short notice, into pollution response vessels and set sail in response to Member State requirements. This release relates to the third and latest round of vessel contracting.

A total of seven vessels (oil products tankers) were contracted during this third round, either as primary vessels or as back-up, in order to guarantee a consistent and effective service. The **Forth Fisher**, the **Mersey Fisher** and the **Galway Fisher** operate between the UK and Ireland. The **Bahia Uno** and the **Bahia Tres**

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operate in the vicinity of Algeciras (southern Spain). The **Salina Bay** is based in La Spezia (northern Italy) and the **Aktea OSRV** is based in Piraeus (southern Greece). All vessels will have completed a planned series of drills and exercises to ensure that they can transform and operate quickly and effectively as pollution response vessels when they come into service in 2008. With the addition of these vessels, the EMSA contracted fleet is now as follows:

From 2005

Baltic Sea: (Tinka, Breeze, Tellus, Ophelia and Otilia)
Atlantic and Channel: (Ile-de-Bréhat)
Mediterranean: (Mistra Bay)

From 2006

Mediterranean: (Santa Maria)
Atlantic: (Galp Marine)

From 2008

Northern Atlantic: (Forth Fisher, Mersey Fisher and Galway Fisher)
Western Mediterranean: (Bahia Tres and Bahia Uno)
Central Mediterranean: (Salina Bay)
Eastern Mediterranean: (Aktea OSRV)

In setting these vessels in place, the Agency took a number of different factors into account, including such important issues as the general increase in seaborne oil tanker traffic, especially from the former Soviet Union, and the socio-economic and environmental sensitivities along the European coastline. Given the requirement for cost-effectiveness in fulfilling a 'top-up' role, vessel contracting is preferred over building or buying dedicated spill response vessels. Nevertheless, all vessels are obliged to respond positively to all requests for assistance, regardless of the spill location.

The total value of the contracts is €18.4 million over three years and this covers the price of equipment, pre-fitting/conversion and availability.

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