

EMSA to Launch CleanSeaNet European Satellite Oil Spill Monitoring and Detection Service

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Following an open call for tenders, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) has set in place contracts for a service which will provide EU Member States with processed satellite data for the monitoring and detection of illegal discharges and accidental oil spills at sea. The main focus of the service will be to provide the Member States with continuity of service, economies of scale and rapid response times in supplying processed information.

"This is a first, and significant, step in the process whereby EMSA assists Member States and the Commission in detecting illegal and accidental discharges at sea," said EMSA Executive Director, Willem de Ruiter. "The Member States have the responsibility for implementing Directive 2005/35/EC and this service will ensure that they will be given the necessary support so that maritime pollution monitoring and detection can be done on a larger and more sustainable scale."

Background

CleanSeaNet is a European operational system for satellite detection of oil slicks. The service will begin operating in mid-April 2007 and will provide analysed images from ENVISAT and RADARSAT satellites. A network of receiving stations in Norway, Italy and the Azores (the latter as of 2008) will receive the satellite data, which will then be relayed to control centres for rapid processing and analysis by trained operators. The operators will assess the images generated, together with external meteorological information, to determine the likelihood of the presence of oil on the sea surface and the source of the pollution. The processed and analysed information will then be sent simultaneously to the national authorities in the affected Member States and to EMSA. The time from data acquisition by the satellite to the receipt of processed information by pollution control authorities will be a maximum of 30 minutes.

EMSA has signed a contract with Eurimage SpA, which is the authorised commercial licence distributor for ASAR (Advanced Synthetic Aperture Radar) images from the European Space Agency (ESA) ENVISAT satellite. For access to RADARSAT data, a contract has been signed with MDA, which is the holder of the distribution rights to Canada's RADARSAT-1 satellite and to the future RADARSAT-2 satellite, which is to be launched later this year. A consortium of service providers will be responsible for the downloading, processing, analysis and dissemination of the images and derived information, including alerts, to participating coastal states and to EMSA. The consortium consists of Kongsberg Satellite Services AS (Norway), Telespazio s.p.A (Italy) and Edisoft (Portugal).

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In this area, EMSA was recently tasked, according to Article 10 of Directive 2005/35/EC of 7th September 2005 on Ship-Source Pollution and on the Introduction of Penalties for Infringements of the European Parliament and Council, to *"work with the Member States in developing technical solutions and providing technical assistance in relation to the implementation of this Directive, in actions such as tracing discharges by satellite monitoring and surveillance."*

The scope and aims of the service are to provide:

- a European satellite surveillance system for detecting oil slicks at sea, which will be operational from mid-April 2007, and which can respond to requests from all EU and EFTA coastal states and the European Commission.
- a system that is linked to national and regional response chains, and which strengthens operational pollution response when dealing with accidental and deliberate discharges from ships.
- coastal states with the ability to locate and identify polluters in areas under their jurisdiction. They will have access to satellite images and associated information over the web, and will receive alerts when potential slicks are identified.
- geographical coverage of the following sea regions:
 - Baltic Sea.
 - North Sea and areas around UK, Norway and Iceland.
 - West European waters from English Channel to Gibraltar.
 - Mediterranean Sea.
 - Western Black Sea.
 - Canary Islands and Atlantic EEZ (from 2008)

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