

## Europe Responds to Disasters

EU and NATO provide international reach

**In October 2010, toxic red sludge from a Hungarian alumina plant spilled chemicals into the Raba and Mosoni-Danube rivers. Hungary activated the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism for urgent international assistance in response to pollution caused by the breakdown of a sludge depository in the city of Ajka. The Hungarian authorities identified an immediate need for non-Hungarian experts. A team of five hand-selected experts and one liaison officer from the EU Civil Protection Monitoring and Information Centre, or MIC, deployed to the area within days of the accident.**



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When a toxic red sludge flooded the Hungarian towns of Devecser and Kolontar in October 2010, experts from the EU Civil Protection Monitoring and Information Centre were tapped to help.

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The chemical spill in Hungary is a recent example of a coordinated response to a potential chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear disaster, or CBRN disaster. The EU and NATO both possess agencies capable of leveraging national and international teams to help out in such emergencies.

The European Union's Community Mechanism for Civil Protection is one such organization. Its main role is to provide assistance in major emergencies when a national government desires or requires the pooled expertise of other member states. The EU illustrated this coordination capability in August 2010, when Pakistan's government requested assistance from the international community to deal with monsoon floods. When it arrived in Islamabad, the EU Civil Protection team coordinated aid and personnel arriving from 18 participating states.

The MIC is an important branch of the EU's Community Mechanism for Civil Protection. It operates 24 hours a day under the guidance of the Directorate-General of the Environment of the European Commission. The MIC acts as a hub serving the affected country, participating states and experts dispatched to the emergency site. It provides daily updates on the emergency, using the Common Emergency Communication and Information System. CECIS was created

to provide Web-based notifications to facilitate emergency communication among participating states.

The EU conducts training to improve coordination of civil protection assistance between intervention teams from the participating states and the country in distress. The training includes coursework, joint exercises and exchanges of experts.

NATO also has an organization to coordinate disaster assistance. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre is a clearinghouse of disaster relief efforts among NATO members and partner countries. The EADRCC has managed more than 45 emergencies, including floods, forest fires and earthquakes. It is also tasked with dealing with the consequences of CBRN incidents, including terrorist attacks.

Similar to the EU's Community Mechanism for Civil Protection, the EADRCC functions as a coordination center for NATO and partner countries. It sponsors large-scale disaster response exercises. In recent years, scenarios have included a terrorist attack using chemical agents.

These two organizations are part of the coordinated effort of Europe to leverage the unique capabilities of its partner states to assist in responding to natural and technological disasters. □