

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit

For a Better International Response to Environmental Emergencies

What – Provision of practical assistance to countries affected by environmental disasters such as industrial/technological accidents, chemical and oil spills, forest fires, floods, and other sudden-onset emergencies that damage the environment and human health and welfare.

Why - Industrialisation increases the frequency and magnitude of environmental emergencies. Countries, in particular developing countries, need faster and better response capabilities to cope with such crises.

Who - The Environment Unit is a joint project of the UN Environment Programme and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, bringing together technical and policy expertise and delivery of international assistance in a pragmatic, efficient and targeted way.

Where - The Geneva-based Environment Unit intervenes anywhere in the world through a global network of National Focal Points consisting of governmental organisations responsible for environmental emergencies at the national level.

When – Countries can contact the Environment Unit for urgent assistance 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

How - The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit is designed to ensure a prompt international response to environmental disasters. It acts as a:

Switchboard for disaster notification and alert issuing regular Information and Situation Reports disseminated world-wide.

Broker matching demands from affected countries to offers from donors ready and willing to assist.

Clearinghouse channelling available data, maps, satellite images and other useful information, from sources to relevant end-users.

Focal point mobilising urgent multilateral assistance.

Provider of services arranging for professional, impartial and independent initial assessments and post-emergency analyses to help countries in the response phase.

Backstop providing guidelines for assessments, contingency and emergency response planning, improving emergency reporting procedures and mechanisms, and supplying relevant contacts points.

Supplier of OCHA Emergency Cash Grants up to US\$50,000 for immediate needs.

ORIGIN

The Environment Unit was established in 1994 following extensive consultations with Governments. Ever since it has been recognised as practicable, making best use of available resources, avoiding duplication of efforts and consolidating the valuable experience and expertise available at UNEP and OCHA.

PARTNERS

The Environment Unit collaborates increasingly with other UNEP units and programmes, dealing with the prevention and preparedness aspects of environmental emergencies and other disaster-related matters, including early warning, environmental assessment, chemicals, industry and environment, trade and environment, convention secretariats and all regional offices. The Environment Unit co-operates with partners offering a specialised knowledge both inside and outside the UN system, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

THE ADVISORY GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

UNEP and OCHA have also set up an international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies to bring together national experts and focal points from countries around the world. The Advisory Group meets periodically to review the work of the Environment Unit, share experience and provide guidance and advice on its future activities.

EXPERIENCE

During the recent past, the Environment Unit has responded to requests from the Philippines (spill of mining tailings), Armenia and Georgia (threat of dam breaks), Brazil (forest fires), Chile (acute river pollution), Indonesia (forest fires), Kyrgyzstan (toxic chemical spill), Madagascar (chemical fire), Paraguay (storage of hazardous wastes), Russia (forest fires), Moldova (underground water pollution), Somalia (alleged dumping of hazardous wastes), Kenya (fuel spill), Tajikistan (threat of dam break), Turkey (earthquake) and India (cyclone).

Look for the latest on the activities of the Environment Unit on the Web and don't hesitate to interact with us

http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol

Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Disaster Response Branch
UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Telephone: (41 22) 917 1142
Fax: (41 22) 907 0257/917 0023
E-Mail: OCHAGVA@UN.ORG or sakharov@un.org
In case of **Emergency Only** (24 hours), telephone: (41 22) 917 2010