

DREF Bulletin Update



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: TOXIC SPILL IN KHABAROVSK REGION

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

Period covered by this update: 20 December 2005 to 7 April, 2006.

History of this Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)-funded operation:

- CHF 36,000 (USD 27,425 or EUR 23,055) allocated from the Federations DREF on 20 December, 2005 to respond to the needs of this operation, or to replenish disaster preparedness stocks distributed to the affected population.
- This operation is expected to be implemented for 6 months, and will be completed by 30 June, 2006; a DREF Bulletin Final Report (narrative and financial) will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 30 September, 2006).

The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

Background and Summary

On 13 November, massive amounts of chemical benzene were released by an explosion at the petrochemical plant Jilin Pterolium in Jilin, China. As a result, about 100 tons of benzene, nitrobenzene and other toxins (potentially cancer-causing chemicals) were spewed into the Songhua river, which merges with the Amur river in Russia (known as Heilongjiang river in China) and forms a large part of the border between Russia and China. Watershed of the Amur River amounts to 1,853 thousand cubic kms and the total length of the river is 4,444 km. The Amur water constitutes 95 percent of the overall water consumption of one million people living in Jewish Autonomous Region and Khabarovsk Krai in East Russia. As many as 70 Russian towns (biggest of them are Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-na-Amure) and villages were affected by the pollution.

On 25 December 2005, the toxic spill reached Khabarovsk and was flowing through Khabarovsk city for the period of 5 days, and then it has passed through Komsomolsk-na-Amure between 12 and 16 January 2006. The total length of the toxic spill was 180 km.

State and local authorities have taken adequate measures for minimization of the possible damage: dammed a channel, tested, safeguarded and filtered the water. As a result of these measures, the pollution level of chemical substances such as benzene, nitrobenzene, chlorophenol, toluol in Amur River in Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-na-Amure did not exceed the Maximum Permissible Concentration as it was expected and water supplies to Khabarovsk was maintained. However, the recommendation from the government was the population to use water only for household purposes. The water distributed from Red Cross allowed the vulnerable population to have access to drinkable water during the days the toxic spill was passing through Khabarovsk.

The Russian Red Cross carried out the emergency action of bottle drinking water distribution within the city of Khabarovsk in the framework of "Emergency Response to Toxic Spill Waste in Khabarovsk Region" program. 3,000 vulnerable people of Khabarovsk were supplied with 45,000 liters of drinking water, following the toxic spill in the Amur Rriver which runs through the city of Khabarovsk. The beneficiaries were: lonely elderly, lonely disabled people, homeless children, low income multi children families, low income one parent families, and tuberculosis (TB) patients who are under the patronage of the Khabarovsk regional Red Cross branch.

Coordination

A joint assessment trip of the RRC representatives and International Federation was organized in December. During this visit, meetings were held with the Deputy of Regional Ministry of Health, Chief of the Health Department of Khabarovsk city and representatives of Ministries of Emergency and Social Development. Coordination was established with the government of Khabarovsk Krai (the Ministries of Health, Emergencies and Social Protection). The timely RRC and Federation response was highly appreciated by local authorities, who, in their turn, provided support to the Red Cross intervention by mobilizing volunteers for water distribution and preparing the lists of the most affected.

Objectives, activities and results

Water and sanitation

Objective: To mitigate the impact of water pollution of the Amur River on the most vulnerable communities in the cities of Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-na-Amure

It was planned to supply drinking water to 6 categories of the most vulnerable people (4,560 beneficiaries/2,663 families in Khabarovsk and 100 beneficiaries/40 families in city of Konsomolsk-na-Amure). Nevertheless, the objective had to be significantly reduced in terms of beneficiaries as most of the population of the affected settlements did not need additional drinking water, owing to the good prevention measures taken by the local government for purification of drinking water.

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Khabarovsk krai branch of Russian Red Cross has distributed 45,000 litres drinking water (9,000 of 5 litres bottles) among 2,950 beneficiaries. Distribution of water was calculated according to the "Sphere project" and amounted 15 litres (or 3 bottles) for person (3 litres per person per day for 5 days for drink only).

The following table shows the groups of beneficiaries that were reached:

Categories of beneficiaries	Number of people/families	
	<i>planned</i>	<i>achieved</i>
Lonely elderly	2,553	975
Lonely disabled people	121	840
Street children	134	352
Low income multi children families	783	168
Low income one parent families	694	320
TB patients who are under the patronage of the Khabarovsk regional Red Cross branch	275	345
Total	4,560	3,000



Russian Red Cross volunteers distribute the bottles of drinking water from the water distribution points to the homes of beneficiaries

As indicated in the table above, the number of beneficiaries was reduced, as the local authorities provided enough volume and appropriate quality of water for all the population. Therefore, the National Society assisted only people from target groups, who are residing in private houses and have difficult access to public water distribution points.

The distribution of drinking water started on 14 December 2005 and was completely finalised on 24 December, one day before the toxic spill reached Khabarovsk.

Drinking water was delivered to 14 points in the Khabarovsk town and volunteers distributed the bottles of drinking water from the water distribution points to the homes of beneficiaries. In addition, water was distributed to health care facilities (such as TB dispensary, polyclinics and homes for elderly living alone).

The toxic spill which reached Komsomolsk-na-Amure was diluted and emergency action was not required. Therefore, the DREF budget will not be spent as planned (the total amount of leftover funds is CHF 17,902).

Before the beginning of distribution of drinking water, the RRC was prepared for a successful operation. Trainings for Red Cross volunteers were organized and during these 7 trainings, 210 volunteers were trained. Volunteers recruited came from various walks of life, such as students and social workers. The main topics of the training were as follows: RRC movement, objectives of the humanitarian action, prophylaxis of food and water poisoning, and filling in the reporting forms. As a result of these trainings, the information about the possible food poisoning caused by contaminated water was disseminated among the beneficiaries. All beneficiaries were informed about the ways of prophylaxis of food poisoning and rules of using water at the time toxic spill was affecting the water supply.

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The procurement of drinking water in the city of Khabarovsk was conducted in accordance with the Federation standards.

National Society Capacity Building

RRC has improved cooperation with Local Authorities such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Safety and Ministry of Disaster. The Khabarovsk RRC branch has gained new experience in emergency response in disaster situations. Red Cross volunteers have improved skills in post disaster assessment, response and reporting. In addition, the Red Cross branch image among the population has increased.

A press release (in Russian), with the information on the actions in Khabarovsk kraj was prepared and posted on Federal, Regional and Red Cross web sites. Information about the Program activities and the distribution of drinking water were broadcast on a regional TV station 5 times.

Assessment and lessons learned

The local branch of Russian Red Cross was able to respond successfully to the disaster. The mobilization of volunteers, the commitment of staff and volunteers ensured a enough quality of relief intervention, despite the program being implemented difficultly, due to the climate conditions (the temperature was -20, -25C) and the lack of vehicles. However, confirmation of the information reported during the implementation of the operation was slow (due to reasons like time difference) and coordination between Branches and Headquarters of RRC should be improved in the future.

Possible constraints in the future

The village population living on the bank of the river side was mostly affected, as their main source of food is fish that will remain to be poisoned for a long time. The accident will, however, show its effect in spring time when the iced-up benzene and nitrobenzene will melt. In spring - summer seasons, Amur River will face a “secondary pollution” resulting from the interaction between the agents of toxic spill, which deposited on the bottom sediment. The event will certainly have a strong long-term impact on the environment. New assessment will be needed to measure the possible negative impact on the vital activity of the population.

As there is unspent money of CHF 17,902, the operation timeframe has been extended to the end of June 2006. The Russian Red Cross is planning to use this amount for elaboration, printing and dissemination of 30,000 leaflets for the population residing in 70 settlements located along Amur River. Distribution of leaflets will be conducted during awareness information campaigns for reducing consequences of “secondary pollution” of Amur River.

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