

# Estonia's preparedness for emergencies

Audit report No. OSII-2-1.4/07/18 of 16 May 2007

## Summary

### What's the purpose of the audit?

The purpose of the audit was to assess the preparedness of Estonia for an emergency arising from bird flu, a flu pandemic, large-scale marine pollution and transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals and the operativeness of the system of preparation for emergencies. The National Audit Office hopes to contribute to the improvement of the preparedness through the recommendations given for solving the problems.

### What does the preparedness for an emergency mean?

A state is prepared for an emergency if:

- it has been identified where, when and why an emergency may occur;
- a reasoned assessment of the probability and consequences of the emergency has been given;
- all the risks that need to be hedged have been hedged;
- a plan having a clear chain of command, specifying the roles of all the parties involved and covering all the resources has been established for the purpose of acting in a state of emergency (incl. in the case of a threat);
- the prerequisites for the implementation of the plan have been created by ensuring the existence/availability of the required resources and organisation of training and studies.

It is not enough that in one area, e.g. in the area of health care in the case of a flu pandemic there is a reasonable plan for acting in the case of an emergency and that the plan can be implemented. In order to solve an emergency usually very different tasks need to be fulfilled. For instance, for the purpose of prevention of a breakout of a flu pandemic or prevention of an increase of the scope thereof it may be necessary to establish a quarantine, ensure adherence to the restrictions and public law and order, etc. Also, in the case of a flu pandemic the water and power supply, waste management, delivery of food, rescue services, etc., have to be ensured regardless of the fact that some of the employees have fallen ill. The National Audit Office assessed the preparedness for emergencies on the whole, not by specific institutions. The preparedness for the four aforementioned emergencies was analysed on the basis of the following scheme (see also Annex 2):

**Preparedness for an emergency = prevention of an emergency** (risk analysis and risk hedging measures) + **preparedness for an emergency** (the plan for acting in the case of an emergency and resources for the implementation of the plan)

### Why is the preparedness for an emergency important?

**If the preparedness for an emergency is not sufficient, the emergency cannot be solved with the minimum of damage to the people, property and environment.**

The state is obligated to solve a state of emergency quickly and effectively. In the case of an emergency arising from bird flu, a flu pandemic, extensive marine pollution and transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals Estonia has to fulfil its international obligations. For instance, Estonia must, proceeding from the international hygiene rules (IHR) notify other states of any threats relating to illnesses (incl. bioterrorism), if these may threaten the lives of the people of other states. Estonia also has the obligation to diagnose the agent of the outbreak of the disease. The Central Laboratory of Virology notifies the Health Protection Inspectorate of epidemiologically important infectious agents and the Inspectorate, in turn, notifies the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, WHO and the European Commission.

### What are the results of the audit?

**In spite of the serious efforts of the ministries, which deserve credit, Estonia is not prepared for bird flu, a flu pandemic, large-scale marine pollution or transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals at the required level, because the protection of the people, property and environment has not been ensured. The preparation for emergencies requires much more attention and resources. Amendment of the**

**organisation of preparation for emergencies in such a manner that a ministry in charge would be determined for each emergency (or the Ministry of the Interior be made responsible for any and all emergencies) and granted the rights required for the fulfilment of its duties is inevitable.**

The following table contains a summary of the assessment of the preparedness for emergencies proceeding from the audit criteria.

Criterion	Infectious animal disease	Pandemic	Marine pollution	Transportation accident
Emergency risk analysis	+	+	+/-	+/-
Emergency plan	+	+/-	+/-	-
Implementation of the plan	+/-	+/-	+/-	-

If the special acts regulating the preparedness for emergencies (e.g. bird flu and a flu pandemic) stipulate the responsibility for the performance of the duties required for achievement of the preparedness for an emergency and if preparedness plans have been drawn up in compliance with the requirements of the European Commission with regard thereto, the preparedness for emergencies is a lot better.

In the case of other emergencies, e.g. emergencies arising from large-scale marine pollution and transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals the main problem lies in the fact that there is not leading ministry who would be responsible for the preparedness for and resolution of the emergency. If the responsibility is divided between various ministries and none of the ministries has been given the obligation to lead the process, the preparation of an integral plan for resolution of emergencies, the division of roles and joint acquisition of resources is complicated. Since the Emergency Preparedness Act can be interpreted in such a manner that the Ministry of the Interior is the general leader upon preparation for any emergency, other ministries do not see themselves in the role of being the institution in charge. During the audit the Ministry of the Interior has drawn up a concept for amendment of the legal bases of crisis regulation and formed an inter-ministerial work group in order to prepare the draft Emergency Preparedness Act and the sub-acts thereof.

With relatively little effort and in short time it is possible to achieve the required level of preparedness regarding bird flu emergencies. The work performed for improvement of the preparedness for a flu pandemic emergency is also worth mentioning, but the attainment of the required level will take some more effort and time. In spite of the fact that during the audited period a national marine pollution abatement plan was drawn up, at the end of the audit the absence of the required level of preparedness for large-scale marine pollution has to be noted. The level of preparedness for emergencies caused by transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals is insufficient. During the audit the Ministry of the Interior has drawn up a long-term investment plan for acquisition of the lacking resources.

**What is the organisation of prevention of and preparation for emergencies?**

**The organisation of ensuring the preparedness for emergencies is not effective, because it does not support the preparation of a risk analysis of a high quality or a plan allowing for effective resolution of the emergency. Establishment of the prerequisites required for the implementation of the plan has not been organised effectively either.**

Both prevention of the occurrence of an emergency as well as quick and effective action in the case of an emergency requires the cooperation of many ministries and persons. However, the responsibility for prevention of emergencies and preparation for emergencies is divided between various ministries and agencies in their area of government and the leading ministry, along with the rights required for leadership, has not been determined in the case of all emergencies. In principle, it is possible to determine the Ministry of the Interior as the leading ministry in the case of all emergencies, but that has not been done either. The rights and obligations forming the substance of definitions "management" and "coordination" have not been specified in legislation.

The investments required for the prevention of emergencies and for preparing for elimination of emergencies have not always been identified or prioritised and therefore the optimum financing of the preparation of emergencies out of the state budget is not ensured.

In addition to the aforementioned, the **organisation of the prevention** of an emergency is made ineffective by the following circumstances:

- Upon evaluation of the probability of occurrence of an emergency and extent of the consequences thereof the risk hedging measures have not been taken into account;
- The decisions concerning the need for handling the risks are not made systematically. On the one hand, there is no consolidated overview of all the measures of hedging risks, their effectiveness or costs, and on the other hand, of the measures that need to be implemented or their approximate costs.

In addition to the aforementioned, the organisation of the prevention for an emergency is made ineffective by the following circumstances:

- the availability of the resources required for resolution of each emergency is not ensured. There is no consolidated overview of the required, existing or lacking resources; the acquisition of the lacking resources (e.g. personal protective equipment) is not organised purposefully;
- The training and courses organised for the examination of the functionality of the plan for resolution of the emergency and attainment of the required preparation of the implementers of the plan do not include all the parties involved in the resolution of the emergency.

#### **What is the preparedness for a bird flu emergency?**

**The prevention of a bird flu emergency is effective, but there are some deficiencies in the preparation for the emergency:**

- the management of the resolution of the emergency is not unambiguous, because the Infectious Animal Disease Control Act and the plan do not specify the operation of the Infectious Animal Disease Control Committees as teams of the crisis regulation;
- bird flu control training and courses have not been organised in all the counties, as a result of which the sufficient preparedness of the involved parties has not been ensured.

The recommendations of the National Audit Office to the Minister of Agriculture concern primarily the modification of the Infectious Animal Disease Control Act and Infectious Animal Disease Control Contingency Plan and organisation of training and courses for the purpose of improving the preparedness for the bird flu emergency.

#### **What is the preparedness for a flu pandemic?**

**Estonia is not ready for a flu pandemic.**

A quarantine cannot be established and other measures preventing a pandemic cannot be taken in the case of single cases of flu, which may become a pandemic. The required measures can be taken for prevention of a pandemic flu only when a flu pandemic has already broken out in Estonia. To resolve this problem the Ministry of Social Affairs has prepared the required draft act, but it is modified proceeding from the principles of updated international hygiene rules (IHR).

The plan of preparedness for a flu pandemic does not cover the duties of all the agencies and persons involved in the resolution of a flu pandemic. A plan with a clear division of the roles and organisation of management covers only the health care field, but acting solely in the field of health care is not sufficient for resolution of a flu pandemic emergency. In order to ensure the preparedness for a flu pandemic emergency a supra-area preparedness plan must have been drawn up and the activities of the involved parties must have been organised. It is necessary to establish and apply movement restrictions, ensure the protection of the health, transport, food, etc., of the people involved. Upon auditing it became evident that the persons belonging in the risk group who perform operatively and strategically important official duties do not have enough personal protective equipment or anti-flu medicinal products and the immediate supply of the latter is not ensured in the case of need. The initial prerequisites for the implementation

of the emergency plan in the field of health care have been ensured by way of organisation of training and courses and the existence and availability of the required resources. However, bird flu control training and courses have not been organised in all the counties, as a result of which the sufficient preparedness of the involved parties has not been ensured.

It must be recognised that the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior have, as a result of their cooperation, considerably improved the level of preparedness for a flu pandemic during the audit. The recommendations of the National Audit Office to the Minister of Social Affairs are primarily concerned with the modification of the Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control Act, the flu pandemic preparedness plan and acquisition of the lacking supplies for the purpose of improvement of the preparedness for a flu pandemic emergency.

#### **What is the preparedness for a marine pollution emergency?**

**The preparedness of the state for a large-scale marine pollution emergency is not sufficient.**

In laws and in the Marine Pollution Abatement Plan the Ministry of the Interior has not been designated as an institution generally responsible for the preparedness for large-scale marine pollution or resolution of the emergency and therefore there is not certainty that the Ministry of the Interior will perform the duties of the leading ministry in practice.

**Prevention** of large-scale marine pollution is not effective, because no integral risk analysis for planning the preparedness of large-scale marine pollution has been made and the monitoring is insufficient for early detection of large-scale marine pollution.

The **preparation** for a large-scale marine pollution emergency is insufficient primarily due to the lack of resources. The optimum need for resources has been established in the minimum requirements of HELCOM. There is no systematic overview of the existing and lacking resources, an order to acquire lacking resources is not necessary.

It must be recognised that during the audited period the Ministry of the Interior has considerably improved the level of preparedness for large-scale marine pollution. During the audit the National Marine Pollution Abatement Plan was drawn up, but unfortunately there are still no prerequisites for the implementation of the plan. Estonia's pollution abatement capacity does not comply with the minimum requirements of the Helsinki Convention.

#### **What is the preparedness for an emergency caused by transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals?**

**The state's readiness for an emergency arising from a transportation accident involving hazardous chemicals is not sufficient.**

The leading ministry responsible for the prevention of and preparation for emergencies arising from transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals (incl. large-scale air, soil and groundwater pollution) has not been determined. There is no integral plan for resolution of emergencies arising from transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals, which would set out the roles of all the parties involved and cover all the resources required for resolution of the emergency. Among other things, the organisation of the evacuation of the people residing in the risk area or the hedging of the related risks has not been considered (e.g. protection of unguarded property).

The prevention of emergencies arising from transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals is, in addition to the aforementioned, made ineffective by the following circumstances:

- an integral risk analysis has not been drawn up for planning the readiness for the emergency. Among other things the existing analysis does not include an analysis of the need for evacuation;
- not all of the risks which need to be hedged have been hedged, incl. the transportation of hazardous chemicals on Estonian roads and railroads is not sufficiently monitored, the minimum compulsory liability insurance of the entrepreneurs does not cover the possible losses;
- the state supervision of hazardous loads is not efficient, because the division of work between the competent institutions is unclear and the supervision (incl. the inspection of labelling) is not exercised to the sufficient extent.

The preparation for emergencies arising from transportation accidents involving hazardous chemicals is, in addition to the aforementioned, made ineffective by the following circumstances:

- the existence and availability of the resources required for resolution of each emergency is not ensured. There is no consolidated overview of the required, existing and lacking resources; the existing resources are not sufficient for resolution of an emergency;
- training and studies have not been organised sufficiently in order to ensure the preparedness of the involved parties.

#### **Opinion of the Minister of the Interior**

The Minister agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the audit in principle. The Minister disagreed on the issue of the leading ministry upon preparedness for a large-scale marine pollution emergency and an emergency arising from a transportation accident involving hazardous chemicals.

#### **Opinion of the Minister of Agriculture**

The Minister agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the audit and did not make any comments or add anything.

#### **Opinion of the Minister of Social Affairs**

The Minister agreed with most of the conclusions and recommendations of the audit. The Minister disagreed on the issue of the clarity of the role of the Infection Control Committee and on the issue of the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the establishment of a supply of personal protection equipment and medicinal products for the agencies involved regarding a flu pandemic.

#### **Opinion of the Minister of the Environment**

The Minister agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the audit and did not make any comments or add anything.

#### **Opinion of the Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications**

The Minister agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the audit. The submitted clarifying comments and modifications have been taken into account upon drawing up this Audit Report.

Full text of the audit report (pdf)

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