

## NEWSLETTER FINAL CONFERENCE

MAY 21–22, 2008 CARLTON BEACH HOTEL, SCHEVENINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS



### One joint final conference

On May 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> the Interreg IIIb projects Safecoast and Chain of Safety organized a joint final conference.

These transnational projects, supported by the EU, embarked on a mission to learn from each other's approaches and ideas on coastal flood risk and crisis management. The objective was to consider the questions: 'Are current approaches sustainable in 2050?' and: 'If all fails: are we prepared?'

The *Safecoast project* has taken both technical and strategic views on coastal flood and erosion risk management. "We have learnt from each other by interpreting climate change and socio-economic scenarios, performing risk assessments at various levels, and organizing communication campaigns, and have brought these together in a synthesis."

The *Chain of Safety project* has taken its organizational perspective from the crisis manager. "We have defined scenarios to work with from a contingency point of view. We have written a main linking document for a transnational contingency plan and delivered a set-up for a knowledge centre on crisis-management, both related to coastal flooding."



Dealing with respectively flood risk management and crisis management, both projects are linked to each other. However, their two "worlds" are often divided. For this reason the final conference aimed to build bridges and to stimulate cooperation. The chosen title of the conference was 'Risk meets Crisis'.

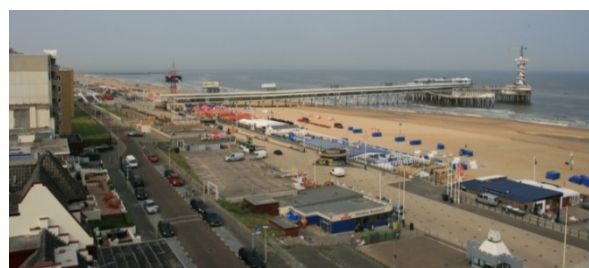
About 100 experts, including policy makers and project managers attended the conference. The programme was interesting and varied, with a movie, presentations, discussions, an information market during lunch and enough time to discuss, talk, eat fish and even to dance! The relaxed and friendly atmosphere proved one of the conclusions of the conference to be true: Europe is about people!

*"We did not only work together, we also became friends"*

### This Newsletter

The results of both the Safecoast and the Chain of Safety projects will be accessible by internet at [www.safecoast.org](http://www.safecoast.org) and [www.chainofsafety.com](http://www.chainofsafety.com).

This newsletter aims to give an impression of some main topics that were considered and opinions which emerged during the conference.



**Main topics of the keynote speakers**



Mrs Peijs (Queen's Commissioner for the Province of Zeeland) welcomed everybody and explained the aim of the combined conference of the SafeCoast and Chain of Safety projects. "In this conference risk-managers meet crisis managers. And that is not something we see normally. Both worlds rely on each other, but do not always have functional contacts".

Mrs Nijhof (General Director for Water Policy at the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management) started with the paradox that only 30% of the Dutch people have confidence in the Government, but that their reliance on water management is very high. In her presentation she focused on future challenges and on Dutch actions for this year. "I am convinced that international knowledge and experiences can help flood management in the future. When I prepared myself for today by visiting the project website, I was struck by the laughing faces on a photograph of one of the international meetings. So I think not only is it important to cooperate, but it can be very nice also."



Mr. Sternheim, Head of the Disaster Control Division of the Ministry of the Interior of the Land Schleswig-Holstein talked on behalf of Minister Hay. He demonstrated the vulnerability of Schleswig-Holstein and stressed that 100% safety does not exist. "Risk and crisis communication is a key element in

the chain of safety. It is our duty to inform people about all hazards, to show them how the authorities are prepared, and last but not least, to show them ways of self-protection. But prevention is also an important link in the safety chain. This means a lose cooperation with spatial planning in order to avoid risks."



Mr. Debyser, Head of Cabinet of the Governor of West-Flanders in Belgium, described a cross-border pilot plan on crisis management in Zeeland (NL) and West-Flanders (B). In this pilot plan a special scenario for coastal flooding had been worked out, with attention to alarm

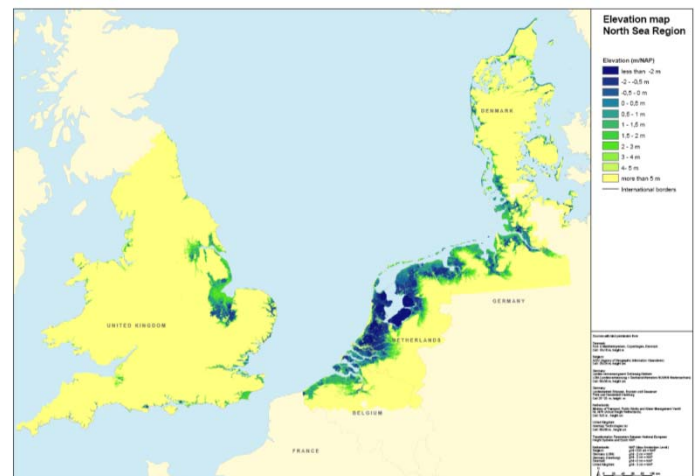
systems, response, shelter and evacuation, responsible command, traffic, logistics, crisis communication to the public and recovery. He also presented the results of an exercise (carried out on May 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) to test the pilot plan. "With this exercise we crossed borders in our job and in our way of thinking and acting."

**Hand over of final products**



After these presentations Niels Roode (Project manager of SafeCoast) and Viék Verdult (Chairman of the Chain of Safety steering group) handed over the final products. "In this cool box we have put together all the results of both projects" Niels and Viék both claimed that the photograph with laughing faces that Mrs Nijhof spoke about could have been one of their pictures. "We did not only work together but became friends! This is a useful spin-off from cooperation in international projects. The EU is about personal contacts!"

*"We need the feeling that people have to do something themselves to be prepared for a flood disaster. People should not rely too much on the government!"*



## Discussion and comments

The conference delegates had vivid discussions. During the first afternoon the discussion took the form of reviews of some statements. The second day started with a duo-introduction by Richard Jorissen and Rosanna Briggs. Some of their "messages":

- Children are an important target group in which to build community resilience. "Children prove to be very pragmatic and to have creative ideas."
- Words can be interpreted in many ways. It is dependent on the perception of individuals. "Keep this in mind during communication!"
- There is not enough interaction between planners and engineers!
- Despite of the lessons of all events since 1953, we need better training and better communication. We still have to learn.

This introduction was followed by three parallel sessions on different themes. An overview of the main topics...

*"Risk meet crisis: possibility becomes reality"*



## Flood risk management

**Statement: There is clearly need for one uniform method for flood risk assessment in the EU**

No:

- The method of risk assessment is dependent on the local situation. The boundary conditions differ from place to place;
- The advantage of different methods is that we can learn from these different methods and share knowledge. This can help to improve our methods;
- Countries differ in terms of culture, institutions and history. We need methods that are tailor-made for each situation!

Yes:

- If a disaster occurs, we need help from the EU. National governments are dependent on EU funding. For this reason it is important for the EU to have one method to assess the risks;

- It is very strange that countries have different assessments methods. Water does not stop at the border. We should look at water systems instead of country borders;

*"As individuals we can learn and can aim to do things better. For society it is much more complex"*

## Theme session

John Ash, Technical Director, Risk & Policy Analysts, started the session with an interesting presentation about flood risk management. Safecoast defined four common drivers for flood risk: climate change, future developments (including spatial and infrastructure development, land levels and coastal erosion. Safecoast reflected all these drivers in maps. Risk assessment aims to quantify coastal risks, to identify possible measures to reduce coastal risk and to assess impacts of these measures (in terms of costs and benefits). Comments:

- We should aim for one common (not uniform) strategy about principles but not about safety standards.
- We have a toolbox full with solutions to reduce the coastal flood risk. Most important drivers are the costs and political choices.
- Combining functions can deliver creative and cost-effective solutions for coastal safety. Share in other initiatives .
- Coastal risk analysis is a supporting instrument; no perfect results are needed! Make it transparent.

## Crisis management

**Statement: Evacuation from floods from the sea is impossible**

- It depends on the situation (the number of people and the warning time, the weather conditions, the response of people: will they leave?)
- Although legally enforced evacuation is possible it takes too much time and capacity to compel people who are not willing to leave. So concentrate on people who want to be evacuated.
- It is impossible to evacuate large numbers of people (think about the traffic chaos). People need to be self-reliant; it is necessary that they can save themselves!
- In some situations it is better to NOT evacuate and for people to stay in buildings and high places.



### Theme session

This theme session started with a presentation of highlights of the PILOT-exercise in the border area between Belgium and the Netherlands. After this presentation the delegates discussed the use of exercises and other relevant questions. Can you prepare for a coastal flood? Should you categorize people you have to save first? Comments:

- Evacuation during storm is impossible;
- We need exercises. We always learn, even from the stress, and it helps to know each other;
- Give people clear information and perspective what they should do!
- It is important to combine knowledge in a common centre;
- You can only organise the chaos during evacuation;
- You have to make priorities: who has to be evacuated first. It is reality, you cannot get everyone out. Who are the most relevant for society...

*"Climate change is not the only problem. We are part of the problem. We have to think about our own behaviour! Hazards coming 20 years are not due to climate change but to unsustainable spatial planning!"*

### Risk meets crisis

#### Statement: the safety is as strong as its weakest link

No:

- If the first chains are very strong, the last chains do not matter. In other words: if the Prevention is perfect, Response and Recovery are not necessary. Think for example about a very safe super dike. "Every euro not invested in prevention, is a lost euro."

Yes:

- It is very dangerous to think that a flood can be prevented. 100% safety does not exist and we have to prepare ourselves. When we do fully trust in prevention, the later chains will be the weakest links! Do not focus only on prevention.
- Do not see flooding as an action of a higher being. Invest in preparation and be prepared to cooperate!

*"Learn to communicate with the public. Otherwise no one will understand you."*

### Theme session

Tina Mertens of the Coastal Division of the Flemish Government presented some statements about "Risks meets Crisis". According to Mertens risk assessment and crisis management are two sides of the same coin. "Who fails to plan, plans to fail". Comments:

- Make risk prognoses as detailed and local as possible. Without this information it is not possible to manage crises;

- For a nation-wide crisis the national level should initiate the response process!
- Translate technical information into understandable concrete information for the public. Make the information as personal as possible!

All participants in the conference agree with the suggestion to link crisis managers to the North Sea Management Group.

*"Take the recommendations of the projects and the conference home and stimulate their implementation in your own organization. Keep your network and share experiences. It is your responsibility!"*

### Some reactions



*"I am proud of the brochure about flooding that was distributed to some 200 000 households in the framework of Safecoast. The brochure explains how people can prepare themselves for flooding. Research demonstrates that 14% of all households really took some measures. I think this is really a success! The idea for our brochure came from the UK. This demonstrates an achievement of Safecoast: in sharing experience and learning of each other!" (Jacobus Hofstede, Schleswig-Holstein).*



*"I was involved in both projects and there is a great link. The outcome of Safecoast is necessary to the Chain of Safety. We have to combine our strengths." (Stephan Gysens, Flemish Government - Coastal Division)"*



*"I think the greatest achievement of Safecoast was that we really worked together and brought out a combined report, and not only national reports. But we did not fully answer the main question of Safecoast "How to manage our coast in 2050". We must go on!" (Thorsten Piontkoviz, Danish Coastal Authority)*



*"What I learnt from both projects was that you get a wider horizon and a broader perspective by international cooperation. For Chain of Safety, I was invited to observe the exercise in Belgium and Zeeland. I had a good impression of the professionalism of the people involved. I am convinced that you learn a lot from exercises (and also from mistakes). I liked both Safecoast and the Chain of Safety, and not only from a professional point of view. It was very nice to meet the people!!" (Matthias Hamann, Schleswig-Holstein)*