



## OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

**Emergency Services Branch  
Environmental Emergencies Section  
(joint UNEP/OCHA)****Environmental Update No. 01  
- Lebanon Crisis -  
27 July 2006****SITUATION OVERVIEW**

Key civilian infrastructure such as power plants, seaports, airport and fuel depots have been damaged during the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East. This could pose acute environmental pollution risks to the local population as well as to relief workers, and add significantly to the already existing major humanitarian burden of the Lebanon crisis.

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (Joint Environment Unit) is the United Nations mechanism to mobilize and coordinate the international response to environmental emergencies and natural disasters with major environmental impacts. In situations such as the current crisis, the Joint Environment Unit's focus is to identify those acute environmental issues posing the greatest potential impact to human life and welfare, and provide practical technical support and solutions to mitigate them.

The Joint Environment Unit has been monitoring the situation closely, appealed under OCHA in the Flash Appeal, and has identified environmental experts who can be deployed to assess and mitigate these risks. The Joint Environment Unit is currently awaiting clearance to send experts to the region. Once deployed, these experts would provide practical technical support and advice through the clusters and to national authorities to reduce hazards to local populations.

In the interim, the Joint Environment Unit is collaborating closely with key partners including WHO, UNE, IMO, the Regional Marine Pollution Response Center for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC), and UNDP-Lebanon to gather and share a full picture of the acute environmental issues. Additional updates and a more detailed report will be prepared and shared by the Joint Environment Unit as information becomes available in the coming days.

**Environmental issues**

Damage to key civilian infrastructure such as power plants, seaports, airport and fuel depots likely pose a range of acute environmental pollution risks that include:

- **The release of hazardous materials into the air.** For example, petrol storage fires typically release toxins such as carbon monoxide, dioxins and particulate matter.
- **Pollution of surface and groundwater and soil** from the likely leakage of fuel and other substances (see also below). This could create both immediate and longer-term risks as fuel is highly toxic.
- **Acute waste management problems** are likely, both from the damage to the infrastructure and the disruption or destruction of normal waste management systems and services. These could expose populations to hazardous materials, potentially impede relief efforts, and create longer-term environmental problems.

The Lebanese Ministry of Environment has also reported to REMPEC on 21 July an **oil spill** of an estimated 10 000-35 000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil along the coastline. This spill apparently originates from the ruptured and burning fuel storage tanks of the power plant in the area of Jiyeh, 30 km south of Beirut. The contamination is reported to have spread as far as Chekka, 80 kms north of the source of pollution.

On July 25 REMPEC distributed a circular to its Parties requesting an indication of whether assistance could be considered to Lebanon once the situation permits, and to date a number of positive responses have been received. Additional information on the spill has been posted on the Lebanese Ministry of Environment's website at <http://www.moe.gov.lb>. The Ministry of Environment emphasized in correspondence with REMPEC the lack of in-country clean-up capacity to address the problem and the need for external assistance, which should be coordinated through REMPEC ([www.rempec.org](http://www.rempec.org)).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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