

SOMALIA - Chemical Spill

Date: August 24, 1985

Location: Mogadishu harbor and surrounding area

No. Dead: None reported

No. Affected: The population in the vicinity of the harbor was threatened by smoke and chemical fumes. Residences and businesses along the harbor area were evacuated.

The Disaster

On August 24, a Panamanian-flag ship, the SS Ariadne, grounded while departing the harbor of Mogadishu. The ship carried 118 containers of hazardous materials and 482 containers of general cargo in its five holds and as deck cargo. Efforts by a Kenyan salvage firm to refloat the vessel were unsuccessful and on September 26, the deck over the rearmost hatch collapsed and a fire broke out. The fire was brought under control the same day, but it produced smoke and chemical fumes that threatened the port area. The subsequent break-up of the ship at the rearmost hold resulted in the release of considerable amounts of heavy fuel oil and drums or bags of chemicals which came ashore in the harbor area.

A principal concern of both Somali officials and technical representatives was the possibility of further fires that could ignite potentially explosive chemical vapors. However, this danger was greatly reduced after October 10 when three of the ship's holds were opened and ventilated. Also of great concern was the extent to which the environment was damaged by the release of oil and chemicals into the harbor. Because the ship had carried 118 MT of tetraethyl lead, it was feared that the leaked lead might enter the food chain and affect human health or cause serious long-term damage to the harbor ecosystem.

SOMALIA - Chemical Spill

Actions Taken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Somalia (GDRS)

Following the localized fire aboard the ship on September 26, the GDRS carried out a limited evacuation of the port and surrounding areas. A scientific and technical committee consisting of advisors from Somalia National University and other local experts was established. They conducted sampling and assessment activities to determine the environmental damage caused by the incident.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the GDRS immediately began to negotiate a contract with Murri International Salvage Company of Mombasa, Kenya. The contract was signed on August 27 and salvage operations began on September 14. However, attempts to refloat the vessel proved unsuccessful because the company did not have the heavy salvage equipment necessary to remove the wreck or its cargo.

Meanwhile, negotiations were underway in London between the SS Ariadne's insurer, the P and I Club, and a large Dutch salvage firm, Smit Tak, which was capable of providing the necessary equipment and expertise. Somali President Siad Barre dispatched the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the Vice Minister of Marine Transport to London to expedite these negotiations. The outcome was a contract between the P and I Club and Smit Tak signed on October 3. The salvage tug and other equipment arrived in Mogadishu in late October, but in the meantime the GDRS attempted to remove as much of the cargo as possible from the deck of the vessel. Large-scale recovery of beached cargo was conducted from October 3 to October 10 under the supervision of police. The recovered cargo, some of which were leaking chemicals, were loaded onto trucks and transported to the port area for storage, posing a serious hazard to port workers.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

Based on reports and personal observation, Ambassador Peter S. Bridges determined that the SS Ariadne presented a severe chemical hazard to the city of Mogadishu. On September 26, he made a disaster declaration and authorized the donation of \$25,000 for disaster relief. On the same day, U.S. Embassy officials met with the Vice Minister of Marine Transport at the harbor to evaluate the disaster. He indicated that this was the first marine disaster in Somalia's recent history. At this meeting Embassy officials learned that Mogadishu authorities lacked the expertise to identify or respond to burning chemicals on the wreck.

SOMALIA - Chemical Spill

In an effort to assist the Somali government, OFDA sent an Emergency Response Advisory Team (ERAT) composed of Coast Guard and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) personnel to Mogadishu from September 28 to October 10. The primary function of the team was to assess the spill area, advise Ambassador Bridges, and make recommendations through him to the Somali government on how best to cope with the disaster. During their 13-day on-site assessment, the team made three recommendations. First, they advised that the salvage agreement with Smit Tak be expedited to remove the wreck as soon as possible. Second, the team recommended that unsafe interim measures be avoided such as improper handling of hazardous material. Finally, the team advised that a contingency plan for coping with future emergencies in the port be developed.

An additional \$7,465 was charged against the Ambassador's emergency funds to cover EPA's expenses. The cost of the ERAT was \$10,252, of which \$2,787 came from FY 86 funds, and the remainder from the Ambassador's \$25,000 donation

The ERAT expressed its concern that the Somali recovery crews wore no protective clothing while handling or swimming around leaking drums. Acting upon a request from the Mission, OFDA sent the following items of protective clothing:

- 50 pairs rubber boots with steel toes
- 50 pairs heavy PVC pants
- 50 pairs heavy PVC jackets
- 50 pairs safety goggles
- 50 pairs heavy rubber gloves

These items were purchased in the U.S. and airfreighted to Mogadishu, arriving on October 8. The value of the equipment, funded from FY 1986 accounts, was \$5,616 and airfreight cost \$1,571.

TOTAL FY 85 OFDA funds.....	\$25,000
TOTAL FY 86 OFDA funds.....	\$9,974
TOTAL USG assistance.....	\$34,974

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported

SOMALIA - Chemical Spill

Assistance Provided by the International Community

France - sent a team of technical advisors and placed two C-160 aircraft on alert, one in Djibouti and one in Reunion.

Germany, Fed. Rep. - sent two chemists and two firefighting experts.

Italy - sent a team of technical advisors.

United Kingdom - sent a team of technical advisors.