

WEBINAR

Water Services First: Introducing IAWD's Crisis Management Training to the Czech Water Service Sector

A sizeable audience gathered in the virtual space to learn about a water-focused crisis management curriculum promoted by IAWD, and its pending wider rollout in the Czech Republic under the D-LeaP framework. The webinar was co-convened by IAWD's partners, the Czech Water Association and the Association of Water and Sewerage Industry of the Czech Republic.

IAWD President and Vienna Water Deputy Managing Director Walter Kling opened the meeting with an invitation always to expect the unexpected: "In 1988, the Chernobyl disaster was a first wakeup call. Then, in 2000, when we set out to develop the Vienna Water crisis management system from scratch, we held debriefing sessions at the end of crisis exercises when we checked off all the things that could go wrong, from terrorist attacks to earthquakes and nuclear fallout. Whenever somebody said, what about a pandemic, we laughed and said, forget it. That won't happen in our lifetime."

"Always expect the unexpected."

(Walter Kling, President, IAWD)

A little older and a lot wiser now, the IAWD has decided to go the extra mile to promote sound, systematic water safety and crisis management everywhere in the region and for utilities of every

size from tiny to huge. Cooperating with risk management specialist Protectum Solutions as Technical Partner in the program development, the IAWD has introduced the Water Safety and Crisis Management Program, using the Danube Learning Partnership to roll out the program.

Before informing on this program, Philip Weller, Head of IAWD's Technical Secretariat gave a compressed overview over 27 years of history, activities and initiatives, from the Danube Water Program and the Danube Water Conference to the Danube Learning Partnership and its Utility Benchmarking Program.

"The benefits will outweigh the investment by far."

(Christian Plohberger, Protectum Solutions)

Then the creators of the program took the stage: Christian Plohberger's company Protectum Solutions specialized in crisis, risk and emergency management with a strong focus on technical infrastructures, especially water. His presentation covered the difference between water safety planning and crisis management, the related task profiles and structural prerequisites, and the aspects of preparation and the training modules contained in the curriculum. "The intention of the program is to generate benefits which really outweigh the investment. The payoff may take years to arrive, and in fact, the later the better, but once a crisis really hits, preparation will make all the difference."

Another pillar of the program roll-out in the Czech Republic is Energie AG Bohemia. CEO Christian Hasenleithner explained why his company supports the Water Safety and Crisis Management Program, providing practical experience and a real-life testing ground for exercises. "Our utilities range in size from very large to tiny, and while crisis management preparation is pretty much standard for companies with a couple hundred employees, it should also be available for small operations with single-digit staffs. This is the promise of this program, and therefore it should get rolled out in every country of the region."

"Crisis management is for companies of every size, even the very small."

(Christian Hasenleithner, Energie AG Bohemia)

Mr. Hasenleithner describes such a rollout for the Czech Republic, beginning with a "train the trainers" workshop over the creation of a Czech language crisis management manual for a typical utility, basic trainings and crisis simulations: "However large or small your organization, the organizational structure is the same", he comments.

A trained trainer then joined in to give his perspective: Jane Vrteski, Senior Consultant for ADKOM (Association of public utility service providers of the Republic of North Macedonia), has held trainings for four utilities in Macedonia in 2019, helping utilities to implement water safety and crisis management standards: "When D-LeaP created this program, North Macedonia joined immediately. We have translated the text of the standards to Macedonian and held a four-month training program in 2019, followed by workshops and conferences to support the implementation of standards. Further group and individual trainings are scheduled." While the ongoing pandemic impacts the training schedule, it also proves the value of systematic crisis management in the most dramatic way

possible: "The crisis impacts range from supply irregularities to health-related lacks of human resources."

"Crisis Management is at the very core of business continuity!"

(Jane Vrteski, ADKOM)

From JPKD Strumica, the centerpiece of the North Macedonian effort, Technical Manager Stojan Eftimov joined in with a prerecorded message, stating that his participation in the training sessions left him absolutely satisfied and confident that the competences he has gathered will contribute to the quality of his company's service.

Wrapping up the meeting, Mr. Kling mentioned the recent earthquake situation in Zagreb: "Crisis management is a state of mind, and whenever you see something like that in the news, a film starts rolling in your head, and you automatically run through the checklist of the necessary responses. Not to mention the value of the learnings you draw from every emergency that hits somewhere in our region. That way, even bad things help us to do better next time."

Throughout 2021, the rollout schedule of the IAWD crisis management trainings will be influenced by changes in the pandemic situation, but the team is confident that progress can be made. Therefore, all interested parties are invited to [contact the IAWD](#) to discuss their options.

Further information, including the presentations and recording of the webinar, can be found on our [website](#)!

This webinar was held in cooperation with

