

Introducing the unified Sohar Emergency Response Organisation

SOHAR Port in Oman has established a unified emergency response organisation in 2020-2021, as the result of a multi-annual upgrade programme. On a 24-hour basis, the Sohar Emergency Response Organisation (SERO) will provide a crew of 10, including a duty officer.



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Gaby van Melick and Dick van Roosmalen are consultants in the field of emergency and crisis management at Kappertijn Safety Specialists, specialising in assisting public and private organisations prepare for large incidents and crises. In its capacity as a consultancy firm, Kappertijn closely follows the developments regarding industrial fire services and works with companies, authorities and knowledge institutions internationally. Kappertijn has been involved with SOHAR Port and Freezone since 2015.

SERO operates one regular and one industrial fire truck, an ambulance, hazmat and foam truck and dispatch centre. Setting up and running a specialised emergency response organisation for an industrial port is no easy task. To meet the high-quality standards of the port and tenants, in an open tender process, a third party was selected as a service provider for the coming 10 years. Strong quality management, good relations and effective information exchange with all tenants and the mutual aid partners have been a crucial part of the work.

SOHAR Port

SOHAR Port is a deep-sea port in Oman, centrally located midway between Muscat and Dubai. The port has an ideal location for the import and export of a wide variety of dry, liquid and gas bulk, break bulk, general cargo, as well as container shipping.

▼ **SOHAR Port has a large industrial cluster for petrochemicals.**

Equipped with deep-water jetties capable of handling the world's largest ships, SOHAR Port has leading global partners that operate its terminals. SOHAR Port is a 50:50 joint venture between the Government of Oman and the Port of Rotterdam.

SOHAR Port saw its first vessel berth in 2004. In 2018 it saw over 3,434 vessels call in SOHAR. The port now handles more than one million metric tons of sea cargo each week. With multinational investments of over US\$26 billion to-date, it is one of the world's fastest-growing port and free zone developments and lies at the centre of global trade routes between Asia and Europe. The port was originally built around three industrial clusters for metals, petrochemicals, and logistics. Recently a fourth cluster was added with the launch of SOHAR Food Zone. The Food Zone offers the region's first dedicated agro-bulk terminal with integrated facilities for food manufacturing, packaging, and food logistics. The new SOHAR Port South expansion, which will ultimately add 250 hectares to the land area, is well underway.



► **The SOHAR deep-sea Port logistics cluster is of vital importance to Oman's economy.**

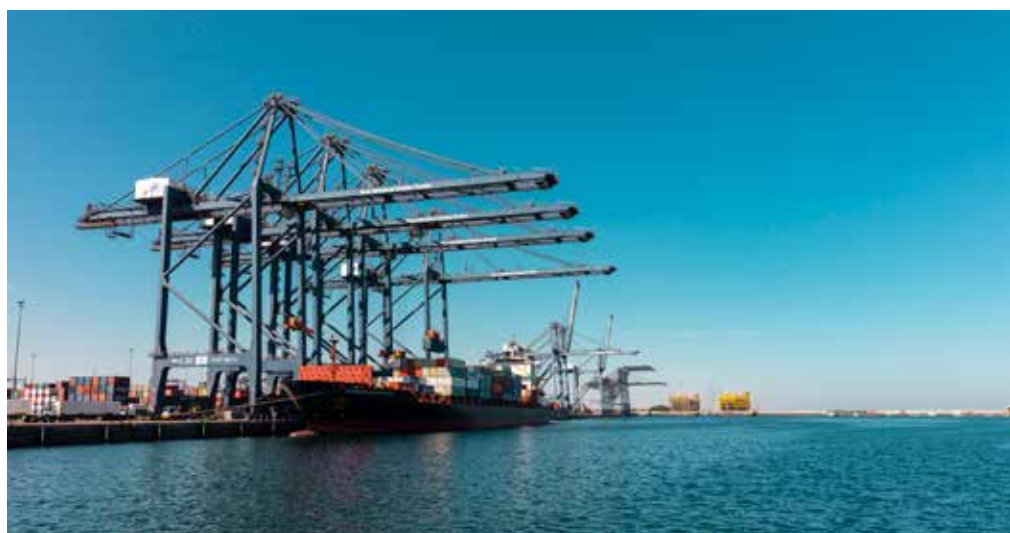
SOHAR Port believes that ensuring the high standards of safety, which also includes a well-prepared and dedicated emergency response, is vital for business continuity.

Current emergency capacities

Currently, several individual tenants operate separate emergency response units. The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) serves all others and the common areas. The smaller tenants do not have the guaranteed capacities and skills to independently fight all larger industrial incident scenarios that may occur in the port and common areas. This became notable after two relatively large incidents in 2013 and 2014. The need to strengthen the emergency response system and to better align with the area risk profile became self-evident. A government committee asked the Port to come up with options to upgrade the level of industrial safety and emergency response.

The result was the Emergency Response Upgrade Programme in 2014. The programme was established by a joint effort of the Port and tenants' Health Safety Security & Environment (HSSE) committee. They worked in close cooperation with experts from the Port of Rotterdam Authority and Rotterdam Safety Authority. The programme was approved by Omani government bodies in 2015. It aims at a sustainable framework for regulations, integrated risk management and reliable emergency response. The framework is scalable to serve future growth in the port and to fit other areas in Oman and the Gulf region.

Since 2015 several improvements have already been realised, such as periodic emergency exercises and drills and Seveso audits by multidisciplinary expert teams. Multiple models were considered and benchmarked against emergency response organisations in other industrial ports. With the introduction of a centralised unit, emergency response in SOHAR Port can be undertaken more efficiently. It is intended that this unit can handle the most common incident scenarios and is better prepared for large incidents.



From Major General Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, PACDA:

"It is the vision of PACDA that emergency response at industrial sites is primarily the responsibility of the industries present at the industrial site. Therefore the establishment of SERO is a major step towards realization of our vision and it is a blueprint for the emergency response at other industrial estates in Oman."

At OQ Suhar, Andre Rabie, Fire Service Manager, and Ahmed al Aufi, Acting Superintendent for the fire brigade were asked to comment, also on behalf of the tenants' HSSE-committee:

"After the industrial incident of 2013, we initiated the build-up of an industrial fire brigade and crisis management organisation to ensure our preparedness for our maximum credible scenario. This required considerable investment in our Omani fire fighters, equipment, procedures and protocols. Today we have an industrial emergency response organisation that we consider our pride."

OQ is the biggest tenant within the Sohar Industrial Port. Given the specific risks and possible incident scenarios related to a refinery, OQ will maintain its own emergency response capacities. In case of larger incidents, we are able and willing to assist SERO and the tenants within the port area. It is very important that mutual aid is tested in a well-prepared training programme. Therefore, large scale exercises are organised, that include assistance by PACDA. We envision more joint drills that will include SERO for hazmat, rescue and industrial firefighting."

Furthermore, SERO will be of added value to OQ, as suppliers and users of our products are also companies within the Port area. It is important for the business continuity of our installations, that possible incidents in the area are dealt with effectively. By establishing a unified organisation, this is prepared as efficiently as possible."

Establishing the unified Sohar Emergency Response Organisation

The specialised and unified Sohar Emergency Response Organisation (SERO) is the collective first responder organisation for all incidents within the Port area. SERO will be highly trained and is prepared to handle various incidents ranging from building and industrial fires to traffic accidents to medical emergencies and traumas. SERO provides medical assistance, standard and industrial firefighting, HAZMAT and technical rescue,

including rope and confined space rescue. It can provide support in case of maritime firefighting and rescue. On a 24-hour basis, SERO will provide a crew of 10, including a duty officer. SERO will operate the regular and industrial fire trucks, the hazmat and foam truck, an ambulance and the dispatch centre. SERO is tasked with providing aid anywhere in the port, within six minutes of the emergency being reported.

SERO is prepared for large scale emergencies, and to this end is supported



▲ SOHAR Port.

◀ Petrochemical activities include storage of raw and finished products. The logistics and metal clusters are visible in the background.

the commercial market. Interested parties were invited to visit the port area, show their qualifications and state their best offer. Since comparable projects are found in various places around the world, bidders were asked to showcase their experience, focusing on some key aspects. Deemed the basis for SERO are the plans for training, Omanisation, staffing and equipment and value added services. Moreover, vendors were asked to plan a preparation year, roughly outlining all activities needed to establish SERO. The evaluation committee carefully studied and scored the bids. It was concluded that Unity Fire & Safety Services LLC submitted the offer that best matches SOHAR's needs.

SERO aims to reflect international best practices while being custom tailored to fit the local needs and conditions at SOHAR Port. The actual 24/7 provision of SERO is the key activity. Maintaining all equipment in a professional manner, providing trained crew and keeping their standards on a high level are essential to provide emergency response in a safe and timely manner. SOHAR Port and its' tenants are constantly improving themselves, therefore a strong Quality Management System is part of the work.

Finally, an important task is to add value for tenants and to reduce the net costs of SERO as much as possible. This will be done through periodic safety checks, maintenance and providing prevention advice for tenants. Good relations, adequate information exchange and effective communication lines with all tenants and the mutual aid partners are a crucial part of the work. Through a cost sharing model, SERO is paid for by SOHAR Port and tenants together.

In conclusion

What's done seldom, is seldom done well. And although large industrial incidents seldom occur, preparation of a well-fitting emergency response is of great value. Therefore, to limit the impact if and when an incident occurs, the people, equipment and specialised skills are of the utmost importance and value for SOHAR Port tenants. This is what the unified Sohar Emergency Response Organisation aims for, together with dedicated mutual aid partners at OQ and PACDA.



For more information, go to
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by mutual aid agreements with OQ and PACDA. The parties will be prepared to assist each other in case of larger or prolonged incidents.

Selecting the Service Provider

Setting up and running a specialised emergency response organisation is no easy task. Especially if high-quality standards need to be met, as SOHAR requires. Therefore, the Port and tenants'

HSSE committee, in close cooperation with mutual aid partners and experts from the Rotterdam Safety Authority and Kappetijn Safety Specialists, opted to select a third party as Service Provider for the coming 10 years.

Selection of the best fitting provider was done in an open tender process. The Upgrade Programme, an updated Masterplan and a specifically prepared Request for Proposal were shared with

Unity Fire & Safety Services LLC, as represented by Managing Director Kevan Whitehead, stated:

"As a local Omani company we are extremely proud and delighted to have been chosen to be a part of the management of the Sohar Emergency Response Organisation. We believe through various developments SERO will become the best practice model for Sea Ports within Oman.

Our extensive knowledge of industrial firefighting and supplying safety services will be the basis for this project in Sohar. Currently we are supplying industrial fire brigades in Oman for several industrial organisations. We are convinced that the SERO project will benefit from our experience.

We envision that SERO will be responsible for the creation of local employment opportunities with a target of around 90% Omanisation, furthermore creating a cost-effective and efficient emergency response organisation for all the tenants and customers at SOHAR Port and Freezone."