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NEAMTWS-ECTE1: The First Enlarged Communication Test Exercise of the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and connected seas

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During the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and connected seas (ICG/NEAMTWS) held in Paris, France, from 23 to 25 November 2010, a task team on Communication Test and Tsunami Exercises (TT-CT&TE) was established. The task team was responsible for the preparation and conduct of the First Enlarged Communication Test Exercise (NEAMTWS-ECTE1) and the organization of its assessment. The aim of the test exercise was to refine procedures for testing the communication of tsunami alert messages between National Tsunami Warning Centres and all Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFPs), including speed and availability within NEAM region. Earlier small size tests, conducted during the previous intersessional period, highlighted the importance of having other communication method like Global Telecommunication System (GTS), and therefore the utilization of GTS during the NEAMTWS-ECTE1 was another aim of the exercise. NEAMTWS-ECTE1 was conducted on 10 August 2011 with the participation of 139 end-users belonging to 42 agencies in 31 countries. A methodical and detailed analysis of the ECTE1 has been provided to ICG/NEAMTWS as a report, where 27 new recommendations were provided in order to improve all aspects of a Communication Test Exercise (CTE), ranging from the manual to the interaction with the media, but especially focusing on the technical and procedural improvements. Some technical problems during the NEAMTWS-ECTE1 have helped to clearly identify certain operational and procedural issues on which NEAMTWS should conclude some guidelines. A Small Scale Communication Test (SSCT-1) focusing on the problem areas of NEAMTWS-ECTE1 was conducted on 26 October 2011 as a follow-up exercise to consolidate the lessons learnt from NEAMTWS-ECTE1. Both NEAMTWS-ECTE-1 and SSCT-1 clearly indicates that message dissemination using fax is the least effective communication method utilized and subject to deficiencies beyond the control of the message provider and/or recipient. GTS dissemination should be considered as very effective, yet more testing needs to be done to obtain a sufficient maturity of the use of GTS within NEAM region.