

Exercise Arctic Guardian 2021 to Enhance Circumpolar Collaboration



Petty Officer 2nd Class Lauren Butnor, a crewmember aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10), climbs aboard Polar Star after participating in ice rescue training in the Bering Strait, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2020. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 1st Class Cynthia Oldham*

WASHINGTON – The Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) will hold a joint online emergency response exercise from April 12-14, hosted by the Environment Agency of Iceland, the Polar Institute of the Wilson center said in an April 12 release.

The goal of the exercise is to improve Arctic nations' capability to respond to maritime incidents requiring joint search and rescue (SAR) and marine environmental response

operations.

The Arctic Guardian 2021 exercise is designed to improve collaboration between Arctic Council and ACGF member states who are signatories of the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA) and the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (Arctic SAR Agreement). The collaborative exercise will provide public and private operational and policy-oriented SAR and marine environmental response organizations with a means to discuss their communication and coordination processes in the event of a marine SAR and/or oil spill incident in the Arctic.

The Arctic Guardian 2021 exercise follows a scenario where an oil tanker and an expeditionary cruise vessel collide off the North coast of Iceland. Originally intended as a live exercise following a table-top exercise in fall 2020, the virtual format will ensure that all stakeholders can participate, and the global pandemic does not hinder Arctic emergency preparedness.

“As maritime activity in the Arctic increases, it elevates the risk of serious incidents and the need to plan and prepare for emergency and pollution responses,” said Jens Peter Holst-Andersen, chair of EPPR. “It is crucial to test and better understand the challenges of a coordinated response that involves many different players in a safe environment. It allows us to not only test response activities, but also build and strengthen the relationships between these diverse players, which are incredibly important at the time of real emergency.”

“As we know, disasters can strike without any previous indication, anytime, anywhere. The Arctic and adjacent regions are incredibly challenging,” said RADM Georg Lárusson, chair of the ACGF and director general of the Icelandic Coast Guard. “Therefore, we have to exercise and prepare for major

incidents, emphasizing harsh weather conditions, long distances involved and limited infrastructure. That is precisely the purpose of the Arctic Guardian exercise and workshop. We share and cooperate to battle these elements to make the area safer for the inhabitants and guests.”

The Arctic Guardian 2021 exercise will engage stakeholders in Iceland, representatives from other Arctic States, key non-government organizations and industry actors involved in search and rescue and marine environmental response. The Wilson Center’s Polar Institute will provide overarching facilitation support, panel moderation, and contribute to exercise outcomes. “The Polar Institute team is pleased and honored to participate in this important international effort in support of the ACGF, the Arctic Council, and EPPR as they address the shared challenges brought about by a changing Arctic,” said Dr. Mike Sfraga, director of the Polar Institute. The entities jointly designing and organizing the exercise include ACGF Combined Operations Working Group (COWG), EPPR MOSPA Joint Design Team and the Environment Agency of Iceland.

Following the exercise, an evaluation team will develop an after-action report to document lessons learned and possible areas for improvement in regard to preparedness and response capabilities and processes across the Arctic States in relation to SAR and marine environmental response.