

Emsa to focus on tracking and identification data

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IN A year that is expected to see the European Maritime Safety Agency finally move into its permanent headquarters in central Lisbon, the organisation's priority is to establish Europe's Long Range Identification and Tracking database, writes Michael Grey.

Another major task is the establishment of SafeSeaNet, which will bring together vessel traffic movements in all European waters.

Both of these goals are included in the agency's published work programme for 2008, which anticipates the first five-year evaluation of its working practices, effectiveness and efficiency.

It is expected that the number of agency employees will expand to around 180 this year, 30 more than 2007, with recruitment ongoing throughout 2008.

The budget for the year will be €47m (\$74m).

Around €20m of this is allocated to pollution response, with the agency keeping on standby a number of craft chartered for cleaning up after a serious incident.

Some 51% of the agency's resources are committed to pollution response, while a further 43% will be employed on marine safety tasks.

Brian Wadsworth, who retires this year as chairman of Emsa's administrative board, suggests that with the development and expansion of databases, capturing and disseminating information will become an increasingly important task for the agency in the future.

LRIT, SafeSeaNet and CleanSeaNet (a new satellite monitoring system for oil spills and pollution) are all responding to an accelerating demand for more information on shipping and its operations and services, along with the demand for increased movement.

A dedicated Emsa task force is being formed to assist with the development of LRIT, which according to the International Maritime Organization, must become operational by the end of this year.

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