



Winging it

Dealing with the devastating effects of oil spills on wildlife is a dirty job, and Brussels-based Sea Alarm Foundation has been rightly recognised for its sterling efforts in this area.

At a recent gathering in London of shipping bigwigs from across the globe, Britain's Princess Anne presented the Belgian group with the Sea Trade Awards runner-up prize in the category of Protection of the Marine and Atmospheric Environment. The awards are chaired by the United Nations International Maritime Organisation.

When ships lose oil, seabirds are the unfortunate victims. The oil gets under their feathers, reducing their ability to fly and swim. When they preen themselves, they ingest the oil, making them seriously ill. Without human assistance, most of them will die.

Sea Alarm, a non-governmental organisation, was set up in 1999 to develop emergency response plans aimed at helping nations to deal with

sea birds in case of an oil spill catastrophe.

In 2003, several hundred tonnes of oil was spilt off the Belgian coast from Norwegian-flagged vehicle carrier Tricolor after it had collided with a Bermudan-flagged ship in the English Channel. Sea Alarm took care of 4,500 live seabirds affected by the oil spill.

Having started as a national organisation, Sea Alarm now has its sights set on going global. It's already helping the Belgian government draw up a contingency plan for worst-case scenarios. In March, the foundation held a workshop in Helsinki to develop response plans for the Baltic sea countries.

"Very few countries have plans in place to deal with the birds," said Sea Alarm communications officer Rosalie e'Silva. "Often, it's volunteer networks which try to put in place response plans."

After sorting out the Baltics, the world is the limit.

Sea Alarm's goal is ultimately to

bring together stakeholders from all over the world to make sure that all coastal countries have response plans ready to go.

Full points from Eco Warrior to Sea Alarm which has been getting the job done, however dirty.

Eco-rator, the Eco Warrior's leaf-based rating system

-  Oil spill
-  Plastic bag
-  Recyclable
-  Compost
-  Biotope