Two annual marine pollution response joint exercises, this year code-named Oilex 2016 and the Maritime Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) Exercise 2016, were held simultaneously this morning (October 27) off Tuen Mun to test marine pollution responses in the event of pollution caused by oil spillage and the spread of HNS in Hong Kong waters.

In the test scenario, an oil tanker collided with a container vessel. The fuel oil carried by the tanker was found leaking and the tanker later anchored to the south of Pearl Island. Meanwhile, five containers loaded with phosphoric acid solution (85 per cent concentration) fell from the container vessel into the sea, and subsequently drifted in the vicinity of the incident and leaked phosphoric acid solution. During the joint exercises, response groups were tasked to contain and clean up the spilled oil and chemicals, which would have posed threats to the nearby environment and facilities.

In the wake of the simulated oil spill, oil combat teams deployed floating barrier booms to encircle the tanker while salvage teams transferred the fuel oil and patched up the leakage. The teams also set up barrier booms near the tanker, used oil skimmers and simulated the spraying of oil dispersant with sea water from pollution control vessels to prevent the spill from spreading. Simultaneously, a shoreline cleansing team conducted a shoreline oil clean-up drill at the beach near Tsing Lung Garden.

In combating the simulated HNS spill, the response teams lifted the damaged containers out from the sea and sprayed seawater on the sea surface to simulate dispersing the acidic plume and expediting the dilution of phosphoric acid solution.

Under the Maritime Oil Spill Response Plan, the Marine Department (MD) co-ordinated the oil spill response exercise, while other government departments including the Civil Aid Service and the Hong Kong Police Force took part. Several oil companies and Hong Kong Response Limited also participated in the exercise.

The HNS spill response exercise was co-organised by the MD and the Environmental Protection Department with participation from the Fire Services Department, the Government Laboratory and the Hong Kong Police Force.
The exercises provided hands-on experience for relevant departments to adopt an emergency response strategy to prevent pollution according to the properties of the substances concerned.