
Drill Monitoring Annual Report

2011

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2011 Drill Report Index

Date	Report Number	Drill Description
April 14	752.431.110414	Unannounced VMT Personnel Verification Drill
April 18	752.431.110418	Naked Island Nearshore Drill
April 26	752.431.110426	Port Valdez Open Water Operational Readiness Exercise
May 7	752.431.110507	S/R SIERRIA Emergency Towing Exercise
May 17	752.431.110517	Nighttime Barge 450-3 Open Water Readiness Exercise
May 19	752.431.1110519	Bp/ATC Wildlife Deployment Exercise
May 25	752.431.110525	POLAR RESOLUTION Emergency Towing Assist Exercise
June 18	752.431.110618	Port Valdez Dispersant Exercise
June 26	752.431.110626	POLAR ENDEAVOR Emergency Towing Exercise
July 20	752.431.110720	VMT Summer 2011 Exercise
July 21	752.431.110721	T/V Alaskan Navigator Emergency Towing Exercise
July 26	752.431.110726	Barge Allison Creek Terminator Skimmer Deployment
Sept. 27	752.431.110927	BP PWS Scenario 809 Exercise
Oct. 3	752.431.111003	Unannounced USGC VMT Scenario 2 Drill
Oct. 12	752.431.111013	VMT Fall Exercise
Oct. 15	752.431.111015	Port Valdez In-Situ Burning Exercise
Oct. 15	752.431.111015TT	ALASKAN EXPLORER Emergency Assist Towing Exercise
Nov. 9	752.431.111109	Nelson Bay Nearshore Readiness Exercise
Nov. 28	752.431.111128	Port Valdez Open Water Readiness Exercise
Dec. 30	752.431.111230	VMT Snow Containment Exercise

2011 Drill Summary

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) staff observed and evaluated 20 drills and exercises in 2011. In addition to the drills and exercises, staff also participated in Alyeska's Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) 2011 fishing vessel trainings. All of these reports fall into the categories described below.

Tanker Towing Exercises

SERVS conducted eight tanker emergency towing exercises in 2011. These exercises were conducted throughout the summer and early fall, the last one occurring on October 15, 2011. The exercises followed the same format as the previous three years with

tankers being arrested with one tug and then being towed with one of the Prevention and Response Tugs and their emergency towing packages. Most of the towing exercises that were observed went very well. The one exception was the T/V POLAR RESOLUTION exercise on May 25, 2011. This exercise was ended early due to the first shackle of the towline hanging up on the port side caprail at the stern of the Tug AWARE. While coming free of the boat, a steel thimble protecting the eye splice in the AmSteel line was torn loose from the eye splice. This fouled the towline and the drill was terminated.

Open Water Response Exercises

The PWSRCAC staff attended four exercises that deployed open water task force equipment. The fall Valdez Marine Terminal exercise included open water task force deployments of the Valdez Star and the TransRec Barge 450-8. SERVS also conducted a nighttime readiness exercise in the Port of Valdez.

Nearshore Response Exercises

Staff observed and wrote two nearshore exercise reports in 2011. A follow-up 72 hour nearshore drill to the October 2010 unannounced nearshore drill was conducted in April 2011 on the PWS Tanker Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan (Tanker C-Plan). This second drill was announced but many lessons were learned from this drill as well. These two large nearshore drills were drivers for an extensive review of the nearshore response system by the Nearshore Workgroup. This workgroup consisted of the PWS shippers (the Response Planning Group [RPG]), regulators, and PWSRCAC. This workgroup reviewed all of the components of the nearshore response including tactics, personnel, and logistical elements. A report from this work group is expected in 2012.

SERVS also conducted a series of Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) deployments along Knight Island in 2011. However, scheduling did not allow PWSRCAC to attend those deployments.

Valdez Marine Terminal Drills

The Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) had four exercises this past year. Two exercises were planned and two were unannounced drills. On April 14, 2011, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) conducted a follow-up unannounced drill to the July 23, 2010 unannounced drill. This drill was designed to test availability of qualified personnel to fill out the response organization described in the VMT contingency plan. Alyeska was able to put trained personnel in all of the ICS roles as described in the plan. However, ADEC had difficulties verifying some of the contractor's training records in this process. The United States Coast Guard also called an unannounced drill on October 3, 2011.

In July, the VMT conducted a large-scale tabletop drill that included the City of Valdez's response team. This was the first time the city has been involved to this extent in recent memory. Dispersants again played a big role in this exercise as the Unified Command debated whether or not to allow the use of dispersants in the Port of Valdez.

Two equipment deployment exercises were conducted at the VMT. The fall exercise included mixing open water and nearshore response tactics near the loading berths. A late December exercise demonstrated Alyeska's ability to use snow to build oil spill containment areas with snowcats.

Other Exercises

BP and ATC conducted this year's large shipper's exercise that lasted for two days. As in previous exercises, the first day began with SERVS managing the response and then transitioning the spill management responsibility to BP and ATC Incident Management Teams. The scenario was a replay of the 809 Scenario from the PWS Tanker C-Plan.

Also loosely associated with the BP/ATC exercise was wildlife task force deployment exercise conducted in May. This exercise was used to build off of the 2009 ConocoPhillips similar exercise to verify if lessons learned had been implemented.

SERVS Fishing Vessel Training

PWSRCAC staff attended several in and out-of-region fishing vessel trainings. Numbers of fishing vessels have risen from 2009 when the SERVS Fishing Vessel Program was in trouble. Fishermen appear happier with the current program. The 2011 training put an emphasis on nearshore operation such as working with mini-barges and skimmer operations.

Focus of Future Drills and Exercises

Similar to recommendations from recent years, there are several areas that should be included in future exercises. The Prince William Sound Tanker C-Plan was resubmitted in October of 2011 but was found to be insufficient by ADEC. This newly proposed plan was resubmitted in February 2012 and the review process was again underway. There are many areas of the old plan that were not fully tested and will need to be carried over when the new plan is approved.

Operating in the Dark

The issue of operating in darkness has been a recurring theme for the last few years for both open water and nearshore response systems. It is no surprise that in Alaska there are significant periods of darkness while oil is moved every day from the Valdez Marine Terminal by associated tankers. All of the open water response components are crewed to work around the clock. While some exercises including open water resources in darkness have been conducted in the past few years, there have not been nearly enough to allow all of the tug and barge crews and fishing vessel crews to become proficient and remain so while working in the dark. Similarly, even fewer nearshore exercises are conducted during darkness.

Two recent large-scale nearshore exercises were almost shut down because of darkness. There are legitimate safety concerns with working at night in the nearshore environment. However, some tactics can be safely implemented in darkness and these types of

operations do not become safer without practice. More training is needed with fishing vessels during periods of darkness.

Unannounced Exercises

ADEC and the USCG called two unannounced drills in 2011. Unannounced drills provide the only real measure of a plan holder's ability to respond at a point in time. These drills have proven to be valuable over the last few years.

Sensitive Area Protection

There is a difference between the nearshore response components and sensitive area protection components in an oil spill response. The missions of these two components are not the same. Nearshore response systems should be designed to intercept and recover oil as the oil gets close to shore by working the leading edge of the spill. The mission of the sensitive area protection function is to get ahead of the spill in time to be able to boom sensitive areas prior to the oil getting to these areas. Boom deployments can be complex and take many hours and thousands of feet of boom to properly protect these areas. Nearshore response has been the focus over the last few years for good reason. Sensitive area protection has been associated as being part of nearshore response, and protection of sensitive areas should be required to stand on its own. Sensitive area protection should be exercised separately to ensure this critical part of the response system could be implemented when needed.

SERVS Technical Manual Tactics

As indicated in the last several annual drill reports, exercising tactics contained in the SERVS Technical Manual continues to be a concern, and these tactics require more implementation. The SERVS Technical Manual provides a detailed description of most of the tactics that would be used during a response to a spill. These tactics include a listing of both personnel and equipment needed to implement various tasks. These tactics should be tested to determine if the proper levels and types of equipment and personnel are identified to accomplish the tasks.

The following exercises/tactics are recommended for future testing: (1) the Valdez Star with the barge Allison Creek (PWS-OW-2); (2) Lightering Task Force (PWS-OW-3); (3) nearshore sensitive area booming and recovery (PWS- NS-1C, 1D, and 1E); (4) use of Jitneys (PWS-NS-3); (5) on-shore tactics; (6) In-situ burning tactics (PWS-NM-3); and (7) other Wildlife, Waste Management, and Logistical tactics.

Fishing Vessels

The SERVS Fishing Vessel Program is the backbone to the oil spill response system in Prince William Sound. During the last two large-scale nearshore exercises, several themes have emerged that should be tested. Some of the elements of the program that require testing are response activation, vessels crewing, and fishing vessel type availability. The unannounced nearshore drill from 2010 indicated problems with calling out large numbers of vessels at one time. SERVS has made some changes to the system including adding support for some of the large port's Fishing Vessel Administrators. Crewing has also been a problem for fishing vessels as evidenced over the last two large

nearshore exercises. Trained crews have either not been available or have jumped ship to go earlier with other vessels. Both activation and crewing issues should be tested through an unannounced drill. In addition to getting the vessels out of the port with the appropriately trained crew, the last nearshore drills have had issues with fishing vessels arriving on scene that were not appropriate for the tasks that were needed by the task forces. An exercise to match fishing vessels listed in the SERVS database with the tactics described in the SERVS Technical Manual should be conducted to verify adequate vessel numbers of the appropriate types are available for a full-scale response.

Nearshore Exercises

Nearshore efforts should remain a focus over the next few years. Certain tactics should be further tested and practiced including working in darkness, sensitive area protection efforts, and generally making sure responders are competent with skimmers, mini-barges, boom, and other response gear. The span of control for the Nearshore Group Supervisor (NGS) should also be tested as the current plan shows 13 different task forces reporting to them. The recommended span of control within the Incident Command System is to have just three to seven people reporting to each supervisor.

Other more specific planning assumptions should also be verified via exercises. These include meeting timeframes related to assembling in-region equipment, making sure contracted fishing vessels are available in sufficient numbers as the plan necessitates, and verifying that the eight prescribed nearshore taskforces can be fully operational prior to hour 72 of the response. Task Forces 6-8 in particular are of concern as they are composed of out-of-region vessels, out-of-region response equipment, and would require an additional secondary support barge also coming from out of region. Planning assumptions are very specific about timeframes, and these elements should be tested to verify the timeframes are realistic and achievable.