
Drill Monitoring Annual Report

2012

Prepared By: Roy Robertson
Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

2012 Drill Report Index

Date	Report Number	Drill Description
March 23	752.431.120323.OW	Barge 450-8 Open Water Readiness Exercise
March 23	752.431.120323.NS	Port Valdez Darkness Nearshore Exercise
April 17	752.431.120417	Seward Fishing Vessel Training Recap
May 13	752.431.120513	Valdez Fishing Vessel Training Recap
July 6	752.431.120706	T/V Alaskan Legend Emergency Towing Assist Exercise
July 12	752.431.120712.VMT	VMT Scenario 4 – Wildlife, Waste Management and Vessel Decontamination
Aug. 20	752.431.120820	T/V Alaskan Explorer Emergency Towing Exercise
Aug. 29	752.431.120829.VMT	VMT IMT Field Exercise – Open Water and Duck Flats
Oct. 3	752.431.121003	Tesoro PWS Tanker Exercise
Nov. 8	752.431.121108	VMT Winter Scenario 4 IMT Exercise
Dec. 7	752.431.2013.01.05	Nearshore Operational Readiness – Whittier SAP
Dec. 12	752.431.121213	Cordova Nearshore Readiness Exercise

2012 Drill Summary

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) staff observed and evaluated 10 drills and exercises in 2012. In addition to the drills and exercises, staff also participated in Alyeska's Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) 2012 fishing vessel trainings. All of these reports fall into the categories described below.

Tanker Towing Exercises

SERVS conducted four tanker emergency towing exercises in 2012. Over the past few years, SERVS averaged eight towing exercises a year so this represents a reduction in the number of exercise conducted. These towing exercises were conducted throughout the summer and early fall, the last one occurring on September 15, 2012. The exercises followed the same format as the previous 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. Staff attended two of these exercises and both went well with no significant issues to report.

Open Water Response Exercises

The PWSRCAC staff attended two exercises that deployed open water task force equipment. The August Valdez Marine Terminal exercise included two open water task forces that included the Mineral Creek Barge and the Valdez Star. This was the first time PWSRCAC staff had been able to observe the Valdez Star hipped up to the Allison Creek Barge to allow for additional storage.

Nearshore Response Exercises

Staff observed and wrote four nearshore exercise reports in 2012. Nearshore response has been a focus over the last couple of years that has included a workgroup reviewing the entire nearshore response system. In March of 2012, a Port Valdez nearshore exercise was conducted to test elements of the nearshore response during darkness. During winter, it would be necessary to work in periods of darkness during nearshore response in order to meet shippers' response planning standards. Other nearshore exercises included readiness equipment deployments in Whittier and Cordova in December. Sensitive area protection was also tested in the nearshore exercises.

Staff attended a series of Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) deployments conducted by SERVS in Port Fidalgo and Orca Bay. SERVS suggested some changes to these GRS sites and submitted a report to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation for future updates.

Valdez Marine Terminal Drills

Three exercises were conducted on the Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) in 2012. There was a multifaceted exercise in July that deployed elements of Alyeska's oiled wildlife program, waste management plan, and large vessel decontamination. In August, a field

deployment was conducted that included open water task forces and sensitive area protection on the Valdez Duck Flats.

The full Incident Management Team (IMT) exercise in November was an opportunity to work with the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies on Scenario 4 in the VMT contingency plan that would be used for the government-led exercise scheduled for June of 2013. This exercise was different than most other exercises as it involved the City of Valdez participating as the Local On-Scene Coordinator and providing other staff members within the response organization.

Other Exercises

Tesoro conducted the Prince William Sound Shippers exercise in 2012. This exercise included a full IMT response in Valdez and also included establishing staging areas in Whittier and Cordova. These staging areas would be critical during a spill response as this is where out-of-region equipment arrives to support operations in Prince William Sound. This exercise demonstrated that there are communication issues that need to be addressed in order to make these staging areas turnkey operations.

SERVS Fishing Vessel Training

PWSRCAC staff attended several in and out-of-region fishing vessel trainings. The number of fishing vessels participating in the program has returned to appropriate levels with more than 400 vessels contracted.

Focus of Future Drills and Exercises

Similar to recommendations from recent years, there are several areas recommended to be included in future exercises. The Prince William Sound Tanker Oil Spill Contingency Plan was reapproved on November 1, 2012. The VMT Oil Spill Contingency Plan is being submitted for approval in 2013. Many of the Drill and Exercise areas that need to be considered remain consistent from past years.

Sensitive Area Protection

The new Prince William Sound Tanker Oil Spill Contingency Plan has addressed sensitive area protection as a separate component of the spill response system. Scenario 546 from this plan now includes two sensitive area protection task forces. While the tactics have not changed, this newly defined part of the system needs to be exercised. Additionally, a few of the VMT exercises have indicated there is room for improvement for sensitive areas like the Duck Flats in Port Valdez.

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 oil getting to these areas. Boom deployments can be

complex and take many hours and hundreds of feet of boom to properly protect these areas.

Nearshore Response

Over the past couple of years, the Nearshore Work Group has spent many hours reviewing the nearshore response system of the Prince William Sound Tanker Oil Spill Contingency Plan. Changes to the system discussed by the work group were included in the revisions to the approved plan. In addition to changes in how the nearshore task forces are structured, modification to the 249 barrel mini-barges used to store the recovered oil are also expected. Mini-barges will have discharge pumps mounted in them that reduce the chance of accidental spillage and speed up offloading times. This new oil discharge system will be an improvement, but it will also require more training for SERVS, TCC, and fishing vessel crews until everyone gets used to using the new system.

Overall, many areas within the nearshore response need to be exercised because changes have been made and all of the responders need practice becoming proficient with the new system.

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 the 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, barge, and fishing vessel crews to become proficient and remain so while working in the dark. Similarly, even fewer nearshore exercises are conducted during darkness.

One nearshore exercise was conducted in the dark in 2012 and it involved only 10 Valdez-based fishing vessels. More training opportunities need to be given to all of the vessels used in nearshore response during the winter months.

Unannounced Exercises

Unannounced drills provide the only real measure of a plan holder's ability to respond at a point in time. These drills have the ability to test areas of a response that cannot easily be tested otherwise such as personnel readiness and resupply capabilities. While there are benefits to having announced exercises, we recommend that a couple of unannounced drills be conducted each year.

Technical Manual Tactics

Both the Prince William Sound Tanker and VMT Oil Spill Contingency Plans utilize technical manuals to define tactics expected during a spill response. These technical manuals are well laid out and identify equipment and personnel needed to perform each tactic. While some of these tactics are deployed frequently, others have not been exercised very often if at all. A concerted effort should be made to systematically

exercise each of the tactics in the technical manual within the five years of the planning cycle.

Fishing Vessels

The SERVS Fishing Vessel Program is the backbone to the oil spill response system in Prince William Sound. While the SERVS fishing vessel program appears to be healthy again in regard to the number of vessels participating in the program, PWSRCAC still would like to see exercises conducted to verify the availability of vessels and crews during periods when most fishing vessels are inactive during the winter months.

Most fishing vessel crews only receive the annual training and do not get called out for additional drills. It is difficult to maintain proficiency when being involved with the equipment once a year. There are many aspects of the open water, nearshore, and sensitive area protections systems that have limited opportunities for even the Tier I vessels to practice and become proficient with the tasks. These activities include tasks such as working in period of darkness with TransRec barges, and in the nearshore environment, managing nearshore task forces for more than a single day exercise and implementing a sensitive area protection strategy ahead of the response area. More opportunities are needed for fishing vessels to become and remain response proficient.

Tanker-Towing Exercises

In 2012, all of the towing exercises were again conducted in the summer and fall. It is good to see SERVS increasing the number of towing exercises and include testing all elements required to stop and then tow the tanker. However, the towing exercises should be conducted throughout the year so tug crews can practice responding in all conditions that occur during normal tanker transits in both summer and winter.