



# **Coping with Technological Disasters Appendix K:**

## **Additional Volunteer Coordination Information**

*Prepared by: Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council  
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This appendix is designed to be supplemental information, in addition to Chapter Six of the guidebook, to help a Volunteer Manager set up a Volunteer Coordination Program, including sample forms and suggestions for design of the Volunteer Referral Center.

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# Considerations of a Volunteer Program

This plan has been designed to facilitate volunteer coordination and promote positive community involvement during all phases of a disaster response.

If a Responsible Party (RP) directs the disaster response, volunteer coordination may proceed according to the RP's approved contingency plan. Due to insurance and liability reasons, it's likely the RP will not use volunteer labor at all. The State of Alaska, for example, has a policy of not allowing volunteer labor on a large spill event. A community must follow the direction of Unified Command (UC) regarding volunteer efforts in any spill response activities. A community should also consider its own liability and insurance needs before engaging volunteers in any capacity.

Despite these restrictions, a community may find itself responsible for managing both local and nonlocal volunteer hopefuls. Effort from the beginning to coordinate appropriately with UC (see the organizational chart in Chapter Six), communicate with the public effectively, set realistic expectations, and keep careful records of volunteers as well as finances will go a long way in creating an effective volunteer program.

While addressing this area can be challenging, it is important to plan how the community will handle it. Local facilities may be overrun if volunteers arrive in large numbers. For example, during the Exxon Valdez oil spill, a large population of transient workers and well-intentioned volunteer hopefuls showed up in Valdez and exhausted local campgrounds, public bathroom facilities, grocery stores, and law enforcement. Communities should be prepared to help mitigate this possible outcome, for example by recognizing that any online requests for volunteer support could "go viral" to a much broader audience than anticipated. Concerns of this nature should also be addressed with support from the UC.

## Leadership

Designate a Volunteer Manager (VM) to lead the effort. For the VM, good communication skills will go a long way and can't all be covered here. Some examples include:

- Communicate often. Cover what you know, what is being done, and when the next update will come.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Follow up with, "Would you like me to try to find out?" – and then do it!
- Follow up on inquiries from the public.

The VM should establish a relationship with the Public Information Officer (PIO) working under the direction of UC. The PIO can help provide information about spill response and possible volunteer opportunities. Members of the public may look to the VM for spill updates, so the VM should plan to stay up to date on all publicly available response information.

A clear point of contact for interested volunteers will smooth public engagement. This may be the VM, but could also include a phone number, email, a web portal for volunteer registration, or an online bulletin board with updates.

Active volunteers must also have a clear chain of command, such as a site supervisor and other support staff, so they can:

- Receive all necessary training
- Be assigned tasks or roles
- Schedule work hours
- Be supervised on the job
- Address any concerns
- Ask questions

Scaling the chain of command may be helpful, such as assigning a crew leader to each five volunteers, a supervisor to each five crew leaders, and so on. Additional team members to support the VM may be recruited from among the earliest volunteers.

## Needs Assessment and Recruiting

The VM should discuss the topic of volunteers with UC as soon as possible to determine what, if any, role volunteers will be able to play in response efforts. Even if the UC cannot use volunteers, the local community may choose to establish its own volunteer program for support efforts apart from direct spill response activities.

Here are some recommendations to support the process of identifying volunteer needs, as well as recruiting and placing volunteers:

- A volunteer registration and tracking system will facilitate the following critical pieces:
  - Gathering volunteer information, including contact details, skills, certifications, and availability
  - Trainings completed by each volunteer
  - Volunteer placements and hours
- The community may need to get creative to identify/develop volunteer roles if there are more interested volunteers than jobs. Local agencies, business, schools, churches, or other organizations may have roles that are appropriate for non-professional volunteers.
- All volunteers should complete the appropriate registration process, even if they arrive at a volunteer site ready to help. This is important to prevent chaos, but also to ensure that all training, waivers, screenings, or other liability concerns have been addressed.
- Other professional volunteer organizations may play a role.
  - For example, International Bird Rescue has an established pool of trained and qualified volunteers that can be assigned to tasks not available to non-professional volunteers.
  - Large organizations like Red Cross can provide resources to support volunteer management. The VM may want to seek expert advice and many resources are available online.
- As noted in Chapter Six of the guidebook additional information on volunteer programs can be found in the States BC Task Force document – “Planning Guidelines for Convergent Volunteer Management - June, 2008” at [http://oilspilltaskforce.org/docs/planning\\_for\\_volunteer\\_management.pdf](http://oilspilltaskforce.org/docs/planning_for_volunteer_management.pdf).

# Training and Skill Identification

Training will be provided to all volunteers assigned to jobs during a response. A primary reason volunteers are not encouraged in spill response is because of the lengthy training requirements before working with toxic chemicals such as crude oil, to operate response equipment, or to handle wildlife.

Although it is unlikely volunteers will be assigned to technical clean up roles, even nontechnical volunteers should receive orientation and basic safety training. It may take time for a volunteer to complete all the necessary and required training before starting work, so expectations should be managed appropriately. Trainings can be offered on a schedule or conducted as needed.

Training sessions for volunteers should include:

- Basic orientation to the applicable contingency and unified plans
- Incident Command System (ICS) structure, organization, and general and specific job requirements
- Site-specific hazards
- Environmental and cultural concerns related to the response
- Safety and security procedures
- Proper attire and safety equipment
- Safety training
- Liability
- Limitations on non-professionals and volunteers

The initial volunteer training may be supplemented by additional position-specific training provided once the volunteer is assigned to a job.

## Safety Training

Safety training for volunteers should address the following policies and procedures:

- Workers' compensation
- Drug and alcohol policies
- Firearms
- Equipment use
- Limitations for non-professionals
- Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER)
- General safety procedures (buddy system, safe lifting, etc.)
- Evacuation procedures
- Potential hazards of work environment
- First aid
- Accident reporting procedures

## Screening

Some jobs, for example those where volunteers interact with minors, may require additional screening or background checks. Screenings should be completed and documented before work commences.

# Identification and Record Keeping

It is important to track volunteers and recognize their efforts. The following are suggestions for volunteer identification, record keeping, and recognition:

- Develop and maintain a database of current interested volunteers and skills. A digital volunteer registration could auto-populate this database.
- Ensure that all volunteers complete all necessary screening and training before placement in a job.
- Issue identification badges to all volunteers as they are assigned to specific jobs.
- Encourage unit leaders or agency personnel to document volunteer hours worked.
- Develop and distribute an after-action newsletter or report to all volunteers who participated in a disaster response.

## Volunteer Referral Center

A Volunteer Referral Center (VRC) could be a physical place, an online portal, or both. Tracking and coordinating all volunteer efforts will help avoid confusion, hindering official response activities, or liability issues.

Early volunteers should be used to supplement staffing of the VRC. Roles of the VRC will include:

- Answering questions, phones, and emails
- Compile external requests for volunteer support, generate lists of volunteer openings, communicate volunteer needs with the public
- Volunteer intake and referral to open positions
- Coordinate/conduct general training and orientation for all volunteers, and site-specific training as needed
- Administrative duties for volunteer paperwork, training records, additional screenings, and other documents
- Equipment maintenance for anything provided for volunteer use
- Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed and coordinating its disposal
- Transportation as needed
- Social Media (optional): advertise volunteer opportunities and celebrate volunteer achievements as appropriate (in coordination with the PIO)
- Webmaster: coordinates digital forms, volunteer tracking database, informational website, online bulletin board, and other online functions
- Financial tracking

## Facility

A physical VRC should provide:

- Easy public access, including parking and accessible facilities
- Room for training and orientation - some of this can be conducted online, some will need to be in person
- Clearly defined and effective traffic flow
- Basic communications capabilities (phone, wifi) and office equipment
- Seating with chairs and tables that can be waiting space or working space
- Access to power for charging laptops and cell phones
- Information displayed in as clear and consistent a manner as possible

# Volunteer Information Forms

*Note that these should be updated to be as specific and relevant as possible to the current incident. A digital format with online access that auto populates a volunteer database would be most useful.*

These two forms are available on the following pages:

[Sample Volunteer Request Form](#)

[Sample Volunteer Registration Form](#)

## **Volunteer Request Form**

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Requesting organization/agency/unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**VOLUNTEER NEEDS (Fill out one form per job type)**

Job description and duties:

\_\_\_\_\_

Total number of volunteers needed for this duty: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience, skills, and/or prior training requirements:

\_\_\_\_\_

Training that we will provide to volunteers:

\_\_\_\_\_

PPE, equipment, and/or transportation needs:

\_\_\_\_\_

Job location:

\_\_\_\_\_



Date/time volunteers needed:

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Volunteer(s) should report to the following person for additional training/instruction:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

Follow up date & time: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up action: \_\_\_\_\_

Position(s) filled? \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Volunteer Registration Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Text? Y / N

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Availability:

Do you have your own transportation? Y / N

Are you currently affiliated with any response organization/volunteer group?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ If yes, organization/volunteer group name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please note any certifications, including certification type, agency, and expiration date:

Bird rescue/wildlife hazing/rehab: \_\_\_\_\_

Hazmat/HAZWOPER: \_\_\_\_\_

First aid/CPR: \_\_\_\_\_

Coast Guard licenses: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Pertinent skillsets, knowledge, training, or resources:

Other considerations, if any:

Placement preference: *[Tip: List specific existing volunteer opportunities, or list categories of available roles, such as: administrative support, food preparation & delivery, childcare, etc.]*

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Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (day & eve): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Waiver:

*[Tip: A lawyer or insurance company many have suggestions or requirements for this section.]*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

Training completed? \_\_\_\_\_

Initials \_\_\_\_\_

Date completed \_\_\_\_\_

Placed: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_