
Drill Monitoring Annual Report

2013

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2013 Exercise Report Index

Date	Report Number	Description
Jan 9	752.431.130109	Cordova Provider Training Exercise
June 12	752.431.130612	Joint Port Valdez PREP After Action Report
June 13	752.431.130613 DF	Duck Flats Deployment Report
June 13	752.431.130613 SG	Solomon Gulch Hatchery Deployment
Aug. 29	752.431.130829	VMT Settlement Pond Exercise
Sept. 30	752.431.130930.	Valdez Aerial Dispersant Delivery System (ADDS) Pack Exercise
Oct. 7	752.431.131007	Polar Tanker Exercise Report
Oct. 23	752.431.131023	2013 Fishing Vessel Training Recap
Dec. 22	752.431.131222	Port Valdez Open Water Readiness Exercise

2013 Exercise Summary

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) staff observed and evaluated seven drills and exercises in 2013. In addition to the drills and exercises, staff also participated in Alyeska's Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) 2013 fishing vessel trainings. All of these reports fall into the categories described below.

Tanker Towing Exercises

SERVS conducted six tanker emergency towing exercises in 2013. SERVS typically conducts eight of these exercises on an annual basis. These exercises consist of a tanker calling the drill, having the trailing tug maneuver to its stern past the tether line of the tanker, and then turning the tanker to stop its forward momentum. The second Prevention and Response Tug (PRT) then passes a towline to the bow of the tanker and begins to tow the tanker to safety.

Open Water Response Exercises

Open water exercises are conducted using one of the five TransRec barges or the Valdez Star skimming vessel. Staff attended the Barge Mineral Creek deployment in December. This exercise reinforced the challenges of operating in the winter when two of the three skimmers onboard were found to have ice in the discharge hoses and could not be operated. Icing also created problems during the recovery of the containment boom.

Nearshore Response Exercises

The nearshore response system is made of several different types of spill response elements that include free oil recovery, sensitive area protection, and wildlife capture and hazing. The groups conducting these activities are made up primarily of fishing vessels as part of a task force. These task forces range from four to seven to 27 vessels. The primary nearshore support barge (Barge 500-2) spent most of the late winter and early spring away from Prince William Sound in dry-dock.

Staff attended three exercises that were associated with the nearshore response system. One of those exercises tested use of the Cordova Provider (tug and barge) from Cordova as a mitigation measure while the Barge 500-2 was away.

SERVS conducted a series of Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) deployments in Rocky Bay, Zaikof Bay, and Port Etches. The GRS tactics are developed prior to a response to protect highly sensitive areas. GRS includes information on both booming and recovery strategies. These deployments are used to test the GRS tactics and determine if changes are needed to ensure the effectiveness of those tactics in protecting sensitive areas. Representatives from SERVS, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and PWSRCAC attended these deployments and worked together to make suggested improvements for the sites tested.

Valdez Marine Terminal Drills

Alyeska as the planholder for the Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) agreed with the U.S. Coast Guard's (USCG) request to conduct a Preparedness for Response Exercise Program (PREP) Area Exercise in June. These exercises are large-scale exercises that include extensive planning efforts from planholders as well as the USCG, regulating agencies, and stakeholders.

This VMT exercise was conducted over two days and included full Incident Management Teams (IMT) from the industry and federal and state agencies. The first day consisted of a tabletop exercise of the VMT's worst-case scenario. The second day involved field deployments of open water, nearshore and sensitive area protection equipment. Staff participated in some of the drill planning as well as a member of the evaluation team for this exercise.

The second VMT exercise for 2013 was a field deployment of the terminal's settlement ponds and the command functions associated with that tactic.

Other Exercises

Polar Tankers conducted the other large-scale exercise in Prince William Sound in 2013. This was a very complex exercise that included not only transitioning from Alyeska's IMT to the ConocoPhillips and Polar Tanker's IMT, but also moving command posts from Valdez to Anchorage. This drill presented many substantial challenges including U.S government furloughs of personnel and nasty weather. The drill also included both tabletop and field equipment deployment operations. The weather played a significant role as it provided a dose of Alaska reality. Poor weather hindered field deployments and caused the people transitioning from Valdez to Anchorage to go by road for most of the night. Lessons learned for this exercise were extensive, and included the need to back up response actions when weather is poor at the spill site. This drill also highlighted that weather in Prince William Sound can greatly hinder all response operations, both mechanical and non-mechanical.

SERVS Fishing Vessel Training

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

Focus of Future Drills and Exercises

Many of the drill and exercise areas that need to be considered remain consistent from past years. The list of exercise types below does not include all of the areas that could be focused on but should be considered a good place to begin.

Safety

Safety is always the first priority and everyone agrees with this fact. No one wants to have anyone hurt during drills, training exercises, or actual responses. We have observed

that almost all of the exercises are conducted in good weather and daylight. Is only training in daylight and good weather really the most effective way to train people to respond in poor weather during actual incidents? Safe is safe. If the expectation is that responders will be able to perform in 10 foot seas and 40 knot winds during an actual response as described in the Prince William Sound Tanker Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan's description of Realistic Maximum Response Operating Limits (RMROL) section of the plan, but exercises only occur during good weather and daylight, then that expectation may likely get someone hurt. People need to practice during times with at least moderate weather and darkness when it is possible to stop and carefully evaluate actions and make needed adjustments. It is not expected to exercise in the worst conditions, but that expectation should not be there for an actual response either.

Operating in Darkness and Dense Fog

Being able to conduct response operations in periods of darkness is critical in Alaska during the winter. Dense fog is not unusual in the summer and other times of the year in Prince William Sound and offers the many similar challenges. More drills for both open water and nearshore operations need to occur during periods of darkness and with different fishing vessels. In the past, exercises that were conducted during periods of darkness tended to go in cycles. Primarily, these types of exercises are done with the open water systems and also tend to use a limited number of fishing vessels. A larger pool of fishing vessels is needed when working in the dark with barges as it takes practice to get used to approaching the barges in the dark and staying coordinated and in formation. Nearshore operations also need to achieve a greater proficiency during periods of darkness so operations are not limited to only being able to function for five out of 24 hours in December.

Sensitive Area Protection

There is a difference between nearshore response components and sensitive area protection components in 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 reaching these areas. Boom deployments can be complex and take many hours and hundreds of feet of boom to properly protect these areas.

SERVS has established sensitive area protection packages designed to load on fishing vessels for deployment to selected sites prior to a spill arriving to that site. Sensitive area protection systems should be exercised more often to ensure all components of these packages are adequate for the wide range of sites needing protection. These components should include both harbor or large boom and intertidal boom, with associated blowers and pumps, and many lines and anchors. Sensitive area task forces will likely be working miles away from support barges such as the Barge 500-2, and replacing missing or broken items may be challenging.

Nearshore Response

Nearshore response needs to remain a priority for exercises as this response element requires the most fishing vessels and coordination. Many of the changes that were implemented in the 2012 PWS Tanker Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan renewal still need to be tested, including updated deployment procedures that were created in the nearshore workgroup process.

Open Water Response

Open water response exercises continue to be important to ensure that all crews and fishing vessels working with the barges remain proficient in deployments, recovery and equipment stowage remain response ready. Additional exercises are needed to train personnel and fishing vessels that will be associated with the new Crucial skimmers and Ocean Buster systems. It is an exciting time to have these new systems becoming operational, but a lot of training is needed to ensure these systems are capable of being used most effectively.

Valdez Marine Terminal

The process of renewing the VMT oil spill contingency plan is currently underway and there have been changes to the plan including a revised technical manual. When the VMT Plan is renewed, all of the associated tactics and revised scenarios should be tested to ensure all components will function as intended.

Unannounced Exercises

Unannounced drills provide the only real measure of a planholder'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, PWSRCAC recommends that a couple of unannounced drills be conducted each year.

Technical Manual Tactics

Both the Prince William Sound Tanker and VMT 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 manuals within five years of each 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 with regard to the number of vessels participating in the program, PWSRCAC recommends exercises be conducted to verify availability of vessels and crews during periods when most fishing vessels are inactive in 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 only practicing with the equipment once a year. There are many aspects of the open water, nearshore, and sensitive area protection systems that have limited opportunities for even the Tier I vessels to practice and become proficient with the tasks. These activities include working in periods of darkness with TransRec barges in the nearshore environment, managing nearshore task forces for more than a single day exercise, and implementing sensitive area protection strategies ahead of the response area. More opportunities are needed for fishing vessels to become and remain response proficient.

Tanker-Towing Exercises

Six tanker-towing exercises were conducted in 2013 and all of these were during periods of daylight. As mentioned above, SERVS has a goal to conduct eight of these exercises a year. This is double the number SERVS is expected to complete and shows SERVS is committed to keeping the tug and tanker crews proficient for operations. We would like to see some of these exercises conducted during different times of the year and in periods of darkness to help crews prepare for an event we all hope does not happen.