

**Prince William Sound RCAC
Annual Drill Monitoring Report
2015**

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2015 Exercise Report Index

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June 25	752.431.150625.PEtowAsstEx.pdf	Polar Enterprise Towing Exercise
July 9	752.431.150709.WestHatch.pdf	Westside Deployment of Solomon Gulch Hatchery
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2015 Exercise Summary

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) staff observed and evaluated 10 drills and exercises in 2015. In addition to the drills and exercises, staff also participated in Alyeska's Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) 2015 fishing vessel trainings. All of these reports fall into the categories described below.

Tanker Towing Exercises

Four tanker towing exercises were conducted in 2015. The goal for SERVS is to conduct eight of these exercises on an annual basis but these exercises are reliant on tanker schedules and willingness of the captains to take the time to participate. 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 for five minutes.

Open Water Response Exercises

Open water exercises are conducted using one of the four TransRec barges, the Barge 450-6 with the Crucial skimmer, or the Valdez Star skimming vessel. These exercises typically include fishing vessels to tow boom in a U and/or gated U configuration in order to concentrate the oil for the skimming system. Three open-water exercises were covered by the PWSRCAC staff.

Nearshore Response and Sensitive Area Protection Exercises

SERVS nearshore response system requires the most coordination because of the geographic area it must cover and the number of fishing vessels involved. Each nearshore task force has 27 fishing vessels assigned to it and there are 8 taskforces expected to be on-scene in the first 72 hours for a total of 216 fishing vessels. This does not include the fishing vessels associated with the wildlife and sensitive area protection task forces, which incorporate another 29 vessels that are also being managed by the Nearshore Group Supervisor. The management and logistical support for this many vessels can be challenging and complex.

Staff attended three exercises that were associated with the nearshore and sensitive area protection response system. Two of those exercises were in Port Valdez and focused on sensitive area protection at the Solomon Gulch Hatchery and Shoup Bay. Whittier hosted the other exercise, which was conducted in Shotgun Cove and used the spill equipment staged at SERVS Whittier response center. The Whittier exercise in late October included a logistical component of moving all of the needed equipment from the connex staging area to the docks to be loaded on the fishing vessels.

SERVS conducted a series of Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) deployments in Port Valdez in October and PWSRCAC staff participated in the evaluation of these sites and provided input to the GRS evaluation report that was sent to the

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) for making suggested improvements to the deployed GRS sites. 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. These deployments included a new strategy developed to protect the head of Shoup Bay. Among other suggested improvements were recommendations of installing permanently placed rock anchors to facilitate more secure and quicker boom anchoring along the rock faces at several sites.

Valdez Marine Terminal Drills

The Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) conducted three exercises in 2015. Two of these equipment deployment exercises focused on protection of sensitive areas and the other combined incident management team tabletop with an equipment deployment at the VMT.

The May exercise served as the VMT incident management team exercise and included the deployment of recovery and containment equipment at one of the settlement ponds on the VMT to demonstrate one of the identified tactics assigned during the tabletop portion of the exercise. The October exercise focused on the Shoup Bay GRS deployments that included the development of a new sensitive area protection strategy for the head of Shoup Bay.

Annual Prince William Sound Shipper's Exercise

BP and ATC conducted the Prince William Sound Shipper's exercise for 2015 on September 28-30. This exercise scenario began at hour 48 after response operations had one day to mobilize to the spill site and one day to hide from bad weather conditions. The initial day of the exercise was spent catching up to where the recovery systems were when the weather required the vessels to take shelter. This exercise included the activation of the Regional Stakeholders Committee and a focus on identifying and bringing in out-of-region resources.

SERVS Fishing Vessel Training

PWSRCAC staff attended several in and out-of-region fishing vessel trainings. There are approximately 400 contracted fishing vessels participating in SERVS' program. Trainings were held in Kodiak, Homer, Seward, Whittier, Cordova, and Valdez.

Focus of Future Drills and Exercises

Many of the drill and exercise issues 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.

Edison Chouest Offshore (ECO) Transition

Exercises for all components of the eventual transition from Crowley Marine to ECO will rise to the top in importance. Towing exercises need to continue to ensure that Crowley's performance does not slip and to document the standard that the ECO personnel and equipment must meet or exceed. The plan is to conduct many of the training and exercises in the Gulf of Mexico as the tugs and barges are built and then conduct some demonstrations when they arrive in Prince William Sound. These transition exercises will be critical for ensuring not loss of capabilities occur as the transition takes place.

Tanker-Towing Exercises

Four tanker-towing exercises were conducted in 2015 and all of these were during periods of daylight in the summer. As mentioned above, SERVS has a goal to conduct eight of these exercises a year. This is double to what 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.

Open-Water Response

More exercises with the Barge 450-6 in all seasons and weather conditions, including darkness, need to be conducted. The 450-6 is the prototype for all of the barges that will be coming in from ECO so more time exercising the 450-6 during all of the conditions in which it is expected to operate can provide valuable lessons on potential improvements for these barges' design and operation. Additionally, fishing vessels and crews from Cordova and Whittier should be provided more opportunity to work with the open-water recovery systems because most of the recent open-water deployments have centered around Port Valdez and have used Valdez fishing vessels.

Operating in Darkness and Dense Fog

Operating in darkness has been included in this list for the last several years. Exercise in periods of reduced visibility provided valuable training for those participating and, since most of the winter is in darkness, this was good practice for those crews. Alyeska should continue to include more fishing vessels and response crews so proficiency of working in the dark throughout the system is improved.

Valdez Marine Terminal

The Valdez Marine Terminal's oil spill prevention and contingency plan was reapproved in 2014. As part of the approval, ADEC is requiring some of the plan's spill scenarios be reworked so the changes in the scenarios will need to be exercised. In addition to the changes in the scenarios, there are some

conditions of approval required by ADEC, such as exercising more sensitive area protection sites in Port Valdez. Tabletop exercises for the Alyeska incident management team that focus on responding to potential spill scenarios from the VMT plan need to continue on a yearly basis.

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.

Alyeska focused on sensitive area protection in Port Valdez during 2015, in part because of the ADEC conditions of approval for the VMT oil discharge contingency plan. Sensitive area protection exercise have also been conducted in Whittier with great success. The new addition to the Valdez boat harbor will change the Valdez Duck Flats protection scheme. This will cause the need for more training of the local response crews as they determine the best tactic for protecting one of Port Valdez's most sensitive areas. The sensitive area protection task forces established in the last tanker contingency plan should be exercised more to better refine that system and the logistic challenges to determine if enough resources are dedicated to this critical task.

Nearshore Response

Nearshore response exercises will always be on this list because of the sheer volume of fishing vessels associated with this response area. All of these vessels need to be proficient with the equipment and few have worked with newly modified mini-barges since they have been upgraded. Nearshore response as described in the PWS Tanker Contingency Plan will operate for twelve hours a day. Therefore, many of those hours will require operating in reduced visibility during the months of October to March. This aspect of the operation is rarely practiced and is not very well defined as to what operations can be safely conducted in periods of darkness. More exercises are needed to refine this aspect of the spill response.

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 an unannounced drill 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 of 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 participating vessels, 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 open-water barges and 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.

Wildlife Response

Alyeska will be conducting a wildlife exercise in October of 2016 that will incorporate its annual wildlife training of selected fishing vessel crews. The exercise will include capture of simulated sea otters and birds, hazing wildlife away from a simulated oiled area, and transportation to a stabilization area. This will be a valuable exercise. The next step is to exercise the sea otter hospital that is designed to be set up at the VMT. Alyeska has recently put a lot of money and effort into upgrading components of this facility and should conduct an exercise to test it out and give the wildlife responders some experience with this facility.