

Prince William Sound RCAC Annual Drill Monitoring Report

2014

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2014 Exercise Report Index

Date	Report Number	Description
Feb 25 - 27	752.431.140225	Port Gravina Nearshore Exercise
March 15	752.431.140315	Nelson Bay Nearshore and Sensitive Area Protection
May 14	752.431.140514	Duck Flats Exclusion Booming
June 9	752.431.140609	T/V Polar Resolution Towing Exercise
Sept. 4	752.431.140904	VMT Sensitive Area Protection Exercise
Sept. 16-18	752.431.140916	SeaRiver Maritime PWS Shipper's Exercise
Oct. 29	752.431.141029	Valdez Marine Terminal IMT and Field Exercise
Nov. 7-8	752.431.141107	Nelson Bay Nearshore Exercise
Dec. 1-2	752.431.141201	Bligh Island Barge 450-6 Open Water Exercise

2014 Exercise Summary

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) staff observed and evaluated nine drills and exercises in 2014. In addition to the drills and exercises, staff also participated in Alyeska's Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) 2014 fishing vessel trainings. All of these reports fall into the categories described below.

Tanker Towing Exercises

SERVS conducted five tanker emergency towing exercises in 2014. SERVS tries to conduct eight of these exercises on an annual basis. However, these drills are dependent on the tanker's schedule and the captain's willingness to take the time to complete them. These exercises consists 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 four TransRec barges, the Barge 450-6 with the Crucial skimmer, or the Valdez Star skimming vessel. During the summer SERVS spends many days onboard the Barge 450-6 working on refining the deployment process for the new Crucial skimmer and associated Ocean Busters. PWSRCAC staff spent several days observing these training and deployment sessions during the summer. Staff also attended the actual exercise of this barge near Bligh Island on December 1, 2014. This exercise lasted almost 24 hours and was conducted during the night in sea states up to 5 feet and wind gusts up to 30 mph.

Nearshore Response 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 task forces expected to be on scene in the first 72 hours. This does not include the fishing vessels associated with the wildlife and sensitive area protection task forces.

Staff attended three exercises that were associated with the nearshore response system. Two of those exercises were in Nelson Bay near Cordova where the largest numbers of fishing vessels in the SERVS program are located. SERVS refitted all of their mini-barges with internal pumps to make offloading safer and cleaner. The November exercise was designed to provide training on the new offloading procedures. A large multiday nearshore exercise was conducted in February that did not go as planned because a vessel associated with the vessel decontamination aspect of the exercise sank while transiting to the site. All onboard were safely rescued but the incident caused many aspects of the exercise to be changed.

SERVS conducted a series of Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) deployments in Simpson Bay, Sheep Bay, and Port Gravina. 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

The Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) conducted three exercises in 2014. Two of these equipment deployment exercises focused on protection of sensitive areas and the other combined an incident management team tabletop with an extensive equipment deployment.

The October exercise was based on the VMT's worst-case scenario as described in the then proposed oil spill contingency plan. This exercise afforded the opportunity to have field operations being conducted concurrently with a full-scale incident management team so actual communications and status reporting could be demonstrated. The equipment deployment included open water recovery, nearshore recovery, recovery out of the Drainage 58 containment boom by a TransRec barge, and sensitive area protection. Fishing vessels from Whittier were called out to participate in this exercise. Additionally, GPS tracking buoys were released at the loading berths the night before the exercise and used to provide data on where the leading edge of the oil slick would have been.

Other Exercises

SeaRiver Maritime conducted the Prince William Sound Shipper's exercise in September. This was a three-day event that included running the exercise for the first 36 hours continuously so multiple shifts of personnel could be used. The drill participants had the second night off before continuing the third day. The scenario was a large crude oil spill in mid-sound. This drill featured a transition between the Alyeska and SeaRiver incident management teams, moving command posts from the SERVS' Valdez Emergency Operations Center (VEOC) to the Valdez Civic Center, a robust vessel salvage planning effort, and consulting with the Alaska Regional Response Team on dispersant use.

SERVS Fishing Vessel Training

PWSRCAC staff attended several in and out-of-region fishing vessel trainings. Approximately 400 fishing vessels are contracted to participate in the SERVS program.

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.

Operating in Darkness and Dense Fog

Operating in darkness has been included in this list for the last several years. In 2014 SERVS and Alyeska held three exercises in darkness or reduced visibility. One of the objectives of the Port Gravina nearshore exercise was working in periods of darkness but, when the vessel transiting to the exercise area sank, night operations were taken out of play. However, very dense fog covered much of the exercise area during the second day of the exercise to provide the challenge of working in reduced visibility. The field equipment deployments associated with the October VMT drill also continued safely in to darkness. SERVS also conducted an open water exercise through the night with the Barge 450-6 exercise in December. All of these exercises 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 this trend to include more fishing vessels and response crews so proficiency of working in the dark throughout the system is improved.

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 performed many sensitive area protection exercises during 2014. This is another trend that should continue. 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 that accompany it.

Nearshore Response

Nearshore response exercises will always be on this list because of the sheer volume of fishing vessels associated with this area of the response that need to be trained. 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.

Open Water Response

The new open water recovery system onboard the Barge 450-6 has become operational, but a lot of training is needed to ensure this system is capable of being used most effectively. Some barge modifications were identified during the December drill and need to be completed. The other TransRec barges still need to be exercised as response crews turn over and the fishing vessel crews that support these barges need practice.

Valdez Marine Terminal

The Valdez Marine Terminal's oil spill prevention and contingency plan was approved again 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. Additionally, even though Alyeska put a lot of effort into working on the deployments of sensitive area protection at the Solomon Gulch Hatchery and Valdez Duck Flats, it continues to be a struggle to complete those deployments under the plan assumption of 10 hours even in good weather. In the past Alyeska was able to complete these strategies in well under 10 hours so more practice and maybe even some tweaks to the current deployment procedures or both are needed.

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 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 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.

Tanker-Towing Exercises

Five tanker-towing exercises were conducted in 2014 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.

Wildlife Response

It has been a few years since Alyeska and the Prince William Sound Shippers conducted field deployments focused on wildlife response. Even when these aspects were exercised only portions of the wildlife response was activated. An exercise combining all aspects of the wildlife response would be valuable and should include hazing, capture, transport, stabilization and the documentation trail necessary to get them to their final rehabilitation facility. Additionally, it has been many years since the sea otter hospital was set up at the VMT. The last time the otter hospital was set up, parts of the facility were damaged and needed to be repaired or replaced. This facility should be set up again to ensure it is response ready and has all of the necessary supplies.

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