

*Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Spill Prevention and Response
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Continuous Improvement of Spill Prevention and Response in Alaska

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Spill Prevention and Response is responsible for protecting public health and Alaska's environment, biological, natural and cultural resources from oil and hazardous substance spills and coordinating and implementing the State's prevention, preparedness and cleanup programs. Its mission is to prevent and ensure the cleanup of oil and hazardous substance spills. Alaska has been a leader in the safe handling, storage and transportation of oil and chemicals. Significant progress and innovative improvements have been made under the State's spill laws since 1989.

As a result of these aggressive efforts, Alaska's oil exploration, production and transportation system is "safer" as a result of enhanced prevention measures, "better" at responding because of improved preparedness and our environment is "cleaner" as a result of rapid, aggressive cleanups. These goals are achieved through a "doing it right" approach so that based on sound science, prudent management and responsible, meaningful public involvement and decision-making. Although the risk of spills has not been eliminated, we have learned how to better manage that risk and minimize impacts and costs through

a better response. This report provides an update of ongoing projects to further improve oil spill prevention and response in Alaska.

Contingency Plan Review Project

Alaska is currently reviewing oil spill contingency plan requirements that were put in place in the aftermath of the 1989 spill. The purpose of the review is to incorporate lessons learned and updated technologies and practices, while coordinating with the other west coast states through the Pacific States/BC Task Force to make contingency plans as consistent as possible. Having over ten years' experience in enforcing these requirements, we are focusing on ways to make the process more efficient and fair to all parties while ensuring meaningful public input to spill plans.

Geographic Response Strategies

Alaska has adopted Geographic Response Strategies as a fundamental building block for designing on shore and nearshore protection plans. Geographic Response Strategies continue to be prepared for Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound and the Cook Inlet. These strategies provide tactics and equipment geared to specific locations, allowing rapid response through pre-planning for the protection of highest-value resources.

Best Available Technology

State law requires the use of best-available technology (BAT) in developing key aspects of oil discharge prevention and contingency plans. Periodically the state must review the technologies in use to determine whether they meet BAT requirements. A dedicated effort to identify BAT for selected prevention and response systems and equipment is being undertaken. This effort will include studies, analyses and a BAT Conference to bring together top experts in the field of spill prevention and response from around the world.

Tactics Manual

A prototype standardized tactics manual for oil spill response for Alaska's North Slope has been updated. Use of this excellent model for building standardized tactics and strategies for specific locations around the state is being considered.

Response Software

The "Response" software has been endorsed by Alaska's lead response organizations, industry and spill cooperatives as the common database for maintaining and updating a statewide equipment inventory. "Response" is also the preferred software for use in spills and drills to manage the response and generate ICS forms and reports. As part of the effort to standardize the response "toolbox", a statewide effort is now underway to develop consistent equipment nomenclature for spill planning, response and database use.

Alaska Incident Management System

Alaska continues to develop and fine-tune the ICS for oil spills through a work group effort. The Alaska Incident Management System for Oil and Hazardous Substance Response, or AIMS, was published in January 2000 and is the result of collaboration between industry, spill cooperatives and state and federal agencies. By focusing on Alaska's unique needs, AIMS has received acceptance by both government and industry and is being "road tested" in spills and exercises with the goal of further refinement and usability.

Spill Reports

The Division of Spill Prevention and Response received 1,994 spill reports in fiscal year 2002 and conducted field visits or phone follow-up for 607 of these spills. The Division conducted emergency responses to over 80 significant spills statewide, and continued to monitor ongoing cleanup and recovery activities associated with over 500 prior-year events. Division staff responded safely, with no major injuries. Our spill data is showing improved reporting, smaller spills and better recovery.

Significant Spills

The most significant spill during fiscal year 2002 was the Trans-Alaska Pipeline spill, which occurred approximately 45 miles north of Fairbanks when a bullet hole pierced the pipeline. About 285,600 gallons (6,800 barrels) of crude oil were spilled as a result, requiring an extensive and lengthy cleanup. The spill

illustrated that despite agency and industry spill prevention improvements, a random act of vandalism can still cause significant environmental consequences.

Home Heating Oil Tanks

The Division initiated a public outreach program targeted to owners of home heating oil tanks, including public service announcements and the distribution of educational materials promoting spill prevention at home shows, fairs and conferences in fiscal year 2002. The program focuses on easy preventive measures owners can take to reduce the risk of home heating oil spills. With an estimated 80,000 home heating oil tanks in Alaska, this is a significant area for prevention efforts which will result in better protection of both surface water and ground water resources.

Nontank Vessels and Railroad Contingency Plans

The Division is continuing to implement new legislation requiring oil spill contingency plans for the Alaska Railroad and nontank marine vessels of over 400 gross tons. Public review of the proposed regulations affecting nontank vessels was held in the first part of 2002. A final adoption order has gone to the Department of Law for their review and we anticipate the regulations becoming effective in October 2002. Operators will have six months to comply with the new requirements once the regulations become effective. The public review draft of proposed railroad regulations is being prepared for an anticipated public comment period later this summer.

Charter Agreement and Aging Infrastructure

The Division is continuing to work on oil and gas aging infrastructure issues associated with corrosion, best available technology, and tank standards, and monitored the progress of the North Slope oil companies in fulfilling the terms of the Charter Agreement for the North Slope. The agreement requires an industry investment of at least 17 million dollars in oil spill prevention, remediation and research over a ten-year period. A state-of-the-art corrosion management program is now being developed for a 50-year design life for North Slope Pipelines. Under the charter there is also research and development and accelerated conversion to double-hulled tankers.

Inspections

As part of its ongoing program the Division inspected 85% of the tankers operating in Prince William Sound and 55% of the crude oil spot charter vessels in fiscal year 2002. One-third of all regulated tank farms and terminals were also inspected. Equipment verification inspections were also conducted in conjunction with oil spill contingency plan reviews.

Drills and Exercises

The Division continues to conduct and participate in spill drills and exercises, including the Joint Anchorage/Fairbanks Hazardous Materials Response

Exercise, the North Slope Mutual Aid Drill, the BP Prince William Sound Tanker Drill, and the Valdez Marine Terminal Drill in fiscal year 2002.

AST Remediation and Training

The Division is continuing to work with the Alaska Energy Authority and the Denali Commission to improve the rural fuel storage infrastructure and remediate historic contamination at current and former fuel storage sites. Staff delivered spill prevention training to the operators of bulk fuel storage tanks in over 60 villages in rural Alaska, and conducted assessments at 28 village bulk fuel facilities in fiscal year 2002. Rural fuel handling remains a significant focus of Alaska's spill prevention efforts.

UST Inspections

The Division continues to oversee the third-party inspection of over 400 underground storage tanks and has issued operating tags for all "passing" tanks, which are required in order for the tank owner to receive fuel legally. Over 650 leak prevention violations were discovered and corrected and no actively leaking tanks were found in fiscal year 2002. The ten-year program to upgrade UST's in Alaska has resulted in the closure of over 6,000 tanks, and all but a handful of the remaining 1,000 or so tanks are not yet in compliance with the new State requirements.

Through these and other efforts, the Division of Spill Prevention and Response continues to use sound science, prudent management and responsible, meaningful public involvement in decision-making to “do it right” in Alaska.

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