

Spill Prevention, Planning, and Response

Nationwide, the safe shipment of oil and adequate preparedness to respond in the event of an oil spill are top priorities for both industry and government. Some oil facts:

- The United States consumes over 800 million gallons of oil per day, expected to increase to over 1 billion gallons per day by 2020.
- Over half of the oil consumed is imported, and most imports are carried by ship.



T/V Julie N, Portland , ME, November 1996

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA90) enacted by Congress after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989, strengthened prevention, planning, response, and restoration efforts. Major provisions of OPA:

- Require vessel and facility owners that handle oil as cargo to develop plans detailing steps they will take to immediately respond to an oil spill. These plans must document agreements with oil spill cleanup organizations to respond in the event of an oil spill, be approved by the USCG or EPA, and be tested regularly.
- Require new oil carrying tank barges and tank ships operating in U.S. waters to have double hulls, and require existing tankers to be phased out of this service over a 25 year period, based on the age of the vessel.
- Subject spillers to unlimited liability for gross negligence, willful misconduct, violation of any federal operating or safety standard, failure to report a spill, or failure to participate in the cleanup.
- Establish a \$1 billion Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. The fund ensures that legal or monetary issues do

not impede timely spill response or reimbursement for damages. Spillers are responsible for costs paid by the fund.

- Require the Coast Guard to study navigational measures to reduce spills.
- Allow states to pass stricter laws than OPA 90, which many have already done.

Spill Response

Black oil spewing from a large oil tanker is a powerful symbol of marine pollution and human impact on nature. Significant government and industry efforts are directed toward preventing oil spills and providing adequate response if prevention measures fail. During a spill, specific priorities and steps are taken to meet the challenges presented. For most spills the general goals are to:

- Ensure public and spill responder safety.
- Stabilize the source to stop additional oil discharge.
- Protect sensitive areas to limit the damage.
- Contain, collect, and recycle or dispose of oil.
- Rehabilitate wildlife.
- Implement cleanup strategies for impacted areas.

The response techniques employed in a spill are dependent upon the product spilled, quantity, location, response time, weather conditions, responder capability, and availability of response equipment. First response efforts are improved by pre-identifying resources at risk, protection priorities, available equipment, and response personnel so that the first response is initiated while incident specific priorities are determined. This pre-spill planning is accomplished by Area Committees that consist of representatives from federal and state governments, with input from industry, academia, environmental groups, and the community. The Area Committees have written Area Contingency Plans that identify response resources, cleanup strategies, and resources at risk within their jurisdiction. These plans also identify the appropriate conditions for the various spill response techniques, including mechanical containment and recovery, dispersants and other chemical countermeasures, *in situ* burning, shoreline cleanup and natural removal. The optimal mixture of these response techniques will vary based on spill conditions.

Additional information is available from the sources and contacts listed on the opposite side of this sheet.