

Comments on behalf of
The Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force
Presented to the
**Interagency Coordinating Committee on
Oil Pollution Research (ICOPR) Public Meeting**
Seattle, Washington
May 19, 2010

The Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force was established in 1989 by a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) signed by the Governors of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California as well as the Premier of British Columbia. The MOC was updated and renewed in 2001 when the State of Hawaii joined the Oil Spill Task Force. The Governors and Premier designated the directors of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the British Columbia Ministry of Environment, the Washington Department of Ecology, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the Office of Spill Prevention and Response in the California Department of Fish and Game, and the Hawaii Department of Health to serve as the Members of the Oil Spill Task Force.

The mission of the Oil Spill Task Force is to enhance the abilities of these member agencies to meet their legislative and regulatory mandates to prevent, prepare for, and respond to oil spills in their jurisdictions. We do so by providing a forum for information exchange that improves their effectiveness, and by also providing a vehicle for regional collaboration. Such collaboration extends beyond our member agencies to include regional industry, government, and public interest stakeholders. We have a long history of collaborative projects; reports from our projects, links to our member agencies' and other websites, and a wealth of other resource information is available on our website: <http://www.oilspilltaskforce.org>.

We want to congratulate the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Oil Pollution Research (ICOPR) on its commitment to collaboration as well. We noted in your 2009 Biennial Report that your commitment to working together ranges from member agency funding for both research and collaboration to outreach and coordination with conferences, workshops, and the National Response Team.

We are keenly aware of the horrendous oil spill now going on in the Gulf of Mexico; even though the spill will not impact West Coast shorelines and waters, people and equipment from the West Coast – from our member agencies, from response organizations serving our jurisdictions, and from our federal partners – are helping in the Gulf. For example, Judd Muskat, an Environmental Scientist from the California Office of Spill Prevention and Response, is in the Gulf to assist Dr. Jan Svejksky of Ocean Imaging in the task of aerial imaging of the slick to direct response efforts towards areas where the oil is thickest. More information on the aid we've sent – and are ready to send – is available on our website.

We are also aware of the pressures and demands on your agencies as a result of this response, and know that this event will affect your priorities for years to come. It can only be hoped that renewed public interest in spill response capabilities and best achievable protection technologies will result in improved funding for the research you do.

The spill and response can also be seen as a "spill of opportunity" for oil spill research and development. I think this is already happening as a variety of response techniques are being field-tested. Another potential area for research would be on the long-term fate and effects of dispersant applications. I believe this effort has already begun with the National Institute for Undersea Science and Technology (NIUST) assignment on May 6th to obtain core sediment samples from the seafloor and water samples from the water column in areas near the Deepwater Horizon spill source. Such sampling should continue for at least a year, and might even suggest collection of baseline data collection in areas where offshore drilling is permitted in the future.

Hopefully, another research and development focus growing out of this event may address an area of concern that several Task Force agencies have expressed - which is the need for improved response tools – not only to collect and compile GIS-based field data, but also to correlate that data into consistent formats. There are a number of different response software programs out there now, some of which can do this, but each responding agency or organization may bring its own version to the table, and these versions may not “play well together.” A single format, developed and “favored” by government agencies, could assist in making responses more efficient and effective.

Another research and development priority which the Oil Spill Task Force has promoted for several years is for improving the capability for 24/7 oil recovery operations. The sooner oil is removed from the environment, the less impact that will occur. Some response organizations in Alaska and Hawaii are already capable of this, but the technologies and commitments need to be expanded.

Another oil spill R&D concern expressed by the Task Force member agencies is simply the need for more state involvement in your R&D work. We understand that very few states have adequate funding for research and development, but all states can benefit from awareness of what’s being done and from opportunities to provide input. For those states which do have R&D programs, coordination with your work may save you time and redundant efforts.

With that in mind, the Oil Spill Task Force assembled a “workgroup” last year representing not only our member agencies, but also the U.S. Minerals Management Service, the U.S. Coast Guard’s R&D Center, NOAA, the National Response Team’s Science and Technology Subcommittee, Environment Canada, and the Coastal Response Research Center. This group met by conference call on December 16, 2009 to share information on their current R&D activities; summary notes of that discussion, with links to their research projects, is posted on our website and is a valuable resource for anyone interested in oil spill research and development. The Workgroup agreed to meet by conference call on a biannual basis.

That workgroup also discussed how to get states more involved, since they are not represented on the ICCOPR or the NRT’s Science and Technology Subcommittee. One suggestion was that they could assist with “field testing” new technologies in drills and responses. Since the member agencies of the Oil Spill Task Force are very interested in Best Available Technologies – some even have legislative mandates to require them – I’m sure they would be open to exploring this idea.

In closing, I’d like to express our appreciation for all you do, and encourage you to reach out to state agencies – as well as to your Canadian partners – to enhance the wealth of experience and creative ideas upon which you draw. As you know, collaboration and information sharing can advance good ideas while avoiding redundant efforts.

With today’s electronic communications capabilities, it’s easier than ever to do so. And open meetings like this one can be replicated in multiple venues. We look forward to seeing you at the next Clean Pacific Conference, which will be September 27-29, 2011 in Long Beach, California. We also encourage you to attend or participate in the OSPR/Chevron Technology Workshop scheduled for February 15 - 17, 2011 at Chevron Park in San Ramon, CA.

Respectfully submitted,
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