

POSPET VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE - "SPILLS 911"
Tuesday, February 24
10 am to 12 pm PST

FINAL NOTES

Attendees

BC

- Kristin Day, BC, BC Ministry of Environment
- Michelle Young, Georgia Strait Alliance

WA

- Andy Gregory, Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
- Brian Kirk, WA Sea Grant
- Aaron Barnett, WA Sea Grant
- Jim Sachet, Ecology's SW Response Unit Manager
- Lisa Izakson, Ecology

OR

- Rachel Graham, OR State Marine Board
- Ray Hoy, On Scene Coordinator, Oregon DEQ
- Mike Zollitsch, OR DEQ (BC/States Coordinating Committee member)

CA

- Alexia Retallack – CA Fish and Wildlife – OSPR
- Vivian Matuk – CA Coastal Commission

Regional/Others

- Fran Recht, PSMFC Habitat Committee
- Hilary Wilkinson, BC/States OSTF POSPET Lead

I Review purpose/background

Hilary provided a quick overview of the purpose of the roundtable, including background/context information for the call, including:

- POSPET members are involved in advertising the 1-800-OILS-911 number as part of the "Spills Aren't Slick" campaign. This is a toll free number for the general public to report oil spills.

- Although POSPET members are involved in promoting the toll-free number, almost none are involved in the tracking, reporting and/or follow-up regarding SPILLS 911 that occur within the emergency offices of member jurisdictions.
- At our fall meeting, POSPET members expressed a strong interest in better understanding how the SPILLS 911 call-in line functions in order to improve promotional activities. Hilary promised to coordinate a virtual roundtable, hence today's call.
- Hilary reached out to all of the SPILLS 911 leads for participating task force jurisdictions so that we could get the right person for this call to help answer a series of questions that POSPET members had. From that effort, we got the following individuals to participate
 - OR – Ray Hoy, On Scene Coordinator, Oregon DEQ
 - WA - Jim Sachet, Ecology's SW Response Unit Manager
 - BC – Kristin Day, BC Ministry of Environment
 - CA – no response
 - Note: HI and AK are not currently participating in SPILLS-911.

II Run through individual questions

Hilary reminded participants that she had solicited a series of questions from POSPET members for SPILLS 911 personnel, and that those questions would provide the framework for today's call. Questions were addressed in order, and key discussion points are included below.

Question 1: How are calls to SPILLS 911 tracked at the OSTF level?

Hilary covered this question in Sarah Brace's absence, with assistance from Fran Recht. The data is tracked via the AT&T bill. Sarah scours the data and incorporates it into an existing spreadsheet, from which she creates graphics for inclusion in the Task Force's Annual Report. The current data has been analyzed through June 2014.

Question 2: How are calls addressed on the receiver end?

Hilary asked for a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction response. Highlights follow.

WA

Jim Sachet shared that the OILS 911 number is tracked behind the scenes. WA has a contract for after-hours call receiving and paging. Calls that come in via OILS 911 are routed to the Dept. of Emergency Management (DEM). They ask who, what, where, and when, then hand the information off to Ecology's Spills Program. The Spills program would then call the reporting party back, create an incident report, triage the situation and identify (and if warranted implement) next steps.

SPILLS 911 calls are handled no differently than other notifications that come through. They follow the same basic process of documentation.

Jim queried the database in advance of today's call. Each incident creates a record, and the database goes back to 1997. They received 2,118 calls in a 15-year period. This reflects more than just SPILLS 911 calls. They are also using this line to report tsunami/marine debris. The calls can be teased apart.

OR – Mike Zollitsch

Mike noted that Oregon's system is almost identical to Washington's. Calls are routed through the Office of Emergency Management. He thinks that WA keeps statistics on the different calls so that SPILLS 911 calls can be identified separately. However, the operators don't necessarily know the source of the call.

BC – Kristin Day

Calls are automatically redirected to the emergency/disaster line. It is not possible to know if calls come in from the SPILLS 911 line or their own line. There is a database that tracks it.

Fran noted that the design of SPILLS 911 was to make it seamless. Early on in POSPET, they were thinking that for their own purposes would be nice to have emergency folks ask what number they had called, hence the AT&T billing.

Question 3: Are there stats on calls (and corresponding on-the-ground responses to spills reported in calls) that would help us understand the on-the-ground effectiveness of the hot line?

WA

Every call gets a response in terms of calling back the person who placed the call. At that point, a decision is made as to whether it needs an on-the ground response.

At one point, WA tracked how many locations were placing Spills Aren't Slick materials – local marinas, state park boat launches, port facilities etc.

OR

Like WA, every call that is received gets a response. Some are related to sheens. Most of the responses are on the Willamette and Columbia rivers, where it is high velocity. So, by the time someone gets out on-scene, there is no longer any material.

OR tries to include all of the assets they can and keep track of every spill they get. In marinas, where it is more contained, there is some removal of the oil. The database has a more detailed record of the response.

Questions

- Scenario: There is a recreational boater at a fuel dock that is refueling. They overfill the fuel tank and put fuel in the water, then see a placard and call SPILLS 911. What is likely to happen next?
 - For OR, the person will receive a call back to find out more details. At a fueling dock – if it's gasoline, there is a high evaporation rate, and therefore a lot less can be done. Most marinas also have Coast Guard facilities located nearby, so often their first call is to them.
 - Often it's a gallon or less because it takes a minute or so to pump out. There's actually a vent for a marine tank.
- Do we know relationship between response and calls?
 - WA receives 4000-4500 calls per year and they respond in the field to 25-30% of those.
 - CA receives 8000 calls annually. 3500 are actually petroleum. Marine and inland spills are distinguished.
 - OR - all marine spills are triaged by a spill desk, which determines what the material is and the location. A warden is dispatched to investigate. Of 3500 that come in, they respond to 3000 of them – 1500-1600. Sometimes that means a call, sometimes it means on the ground response.

BC

BC receives 3600 calls/year. Follow up on all the calls in terms of attending in the field. Thirty percent of the overall calls are for spills in the marine environment.

Question 4 – Are there any success stories that POSPET members could share about calls? How effective is SPILLS 911 from your perspective?

WA - Jim thinks the system has a high level of effectiveness. One of its strengths is the direct conversations that occur between emergency managers and reporting parties.

OR - Yes, it seems effective. Especially in terms of the level of awareness of the average citizen. Should an incident occur at a marina or a boat ramp, there is a readily recognizable number for people.

BC – It's working very well. Were just talking about how the spill #s are going up every year – thinks it's a function of increased reporting.

Question 5 – How might POSPET enhance efforts to advertise and promote the SPILLS 911 line?

WA - just had a request for additional signs. Time to start replenishing/replacing a lot of the signage that is out there, so any assistance with that would be greatly appreciated. We make frequent use of the Spills aren't slick stickers

OR - The stickers are great. Suggestion - perhaps POSPET should push state agencies to do more in terms of getting the word out.

Questions/Discussion

- A question regarding whether hanging Spills Aren't Slick materials is a requirement for Clean Marina Certification. Response – no, but also not an issue since most marinas are more than happy to hang the materials.
- One touchy area involves boaters – they often ask why it's important to report even a small spill? There are also complaints about the lack of response. Participants made the following comments:
 - If spiller doesn't report it, and someone else reports it, it can create liability.
 - Any spill of gasoline/diesel to water does cause environmental damage. It's helpful to know about it so that it can be assessed.
 - As educators, we want everyone to report, because although a responder might not go out, it allows us to identify hot spots, understand changes in frequently spilled substances, etc..
 - We encourage people to report because you never know what resources might be at risk. 300 gallons in one spot might not cause much damage and you have time to clean it up. But a small spill in an area with sensitive resources can be significant. Example - in Coos Bay, the state ended up having a fairly large problem. There was an upstream source, with little bits of material coming out all the time.
- A suggestion: in WA, about five years ago, a ramped up boater education system program was started through Parks and Rec. Everyone who drives a boat needs a safe boater card. Boater education program is something POSPET could plug into.
- Any interest in POSPET to tie Spills aren't Slick materials and messaging into social media?
 - This is something that is probably easier for individual jurisdictions to do on their own.

Question 6 – does anyone analyze the call data to determine the top causes of oil spills?

OR - No. OR struggles with causal effect to begin with. Could potentially take a look over a year or two of small spills to see if they can develop causal effect. However, since those are investigated less, there probably is not going to be much information.

WA - Has a fairly robust tracking mechanism. A lot of information is captured for every incident each year. What they know currently is that the most common spills are small spills, generally oil and gasoline. Hydraulic fuels are becoming more prevalent, though not necessarily #1. The majority of small spills are from boaters.

Questions/Discussion

- There seems to be a disconnect in terms of people's understanding of the proportion of spills that are small spills, the cumulative effects of small spills, and data to support statements regarding cumulative effects of small spills. Big handlers of oil are much more tightly regulated. If in fact the smaller users are the ones who are putting most oil in the water, there has to be a way to target it and quantify it.
- The whole purpose of SPILLS 911 was to ease the reporting requirements for people who don't have spill response plans, etc. We do know there is increased calling because people can easily reporting a number. It is not necessarily important to tease apart the source of the calls.
- Is it important to tease it out for educational purposes? Seems that we do know that for fueling, because of the vent blowout and spills during fueling, if people don't have a cuff to deal with "overages" – that's a point place. Easier to hang out on a dock – considering how relatively easy it is, seems like we could do a better job.

Take homes and next steps

- CA participants would like to determine how system in CA is working, and how it compares to WA, OR, and BC. They will identify the emergency lead and set up a similar meeting with similar questions.
- WA, OR and BC operate similarly in terms of how the SPILLS 911 line functions. There are some differences in how the data is collected and assessed, with WA having a very robust system.
- There is some thought that understanding more would help with outreach, but in general, there is a lot of support for current POSPET efforts. That said, it would be helpful to better understand the calls to be able to articulate and understand the message about the cumulative impacts of small spills, their major sources, etc., to target outreach.
- Cannot tease out the data (and distinguish between calls made due to SPILLS 911 program and other calls) because jurisdictions lack the differentiation between source of call (spills 911 and others)
- POSPET members would like to regroup and think about our mission. Look higher level – what are goals and missions for POSPET – then use the data available to drive education programs. Maybe work on how to standardize info to do focused education. We will bring this topic to our spring meeting.