

# **National Contingency Planning and IMO Workshops in the Caribbean Region**

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## **Abstract**

Over the past several years, RAC/REMPEITC-Caribe has coordinated a series of workshops for countries developing National Contingency Plans for Oil Spill Response. Workshops conducted between 2009 and 2012 in Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, St. Vincent-Grenadines, and Anguilla combined tailored OPRC Introductory courses in spill response with multi-day workshops focused on simplified environmental risk assessment and response planning. Results provide immediate content and input to the national planning effort and provide the foundation for continued workshops toward continued plan completion and improvement.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A key focal area for the IMO-REMPEITC Centre is to promote a harmonized approach to combating marine environmental pollution through training, workshops, and technical assistance. Countries that are developing national oil spill contingency plans and capabilities have tools such as guidelines and templates for plan development (Wotherspoon and Solsberg, 2005; Taylor et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2011). A challenge for development and adoption of a national plan, particularly when in-country knowledge or experience in the subject is limited, is to bring

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together diverse interests representing government, industry, and interested parties to work toward a document and framework that defines oil spill risks and acceptable countermeasure options (Taylor, 2003).

An initial step to integrating participants in the planning process is to provide a basic understanding of oil spills and response. Technical advisors present a basic 8 to 12 hour course to review concepts and practices of oil spill response with topics that parallel IMO-OPRC model courses for marine oil spill response. This background ensures most participants in the workshop have a common understanding of spill behavior, response organization and management, and response operations (offshore and shoreline).

## **WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES**

Following presentation of tailored but standard OPRC courses, the technical team leads participants through a series of steps, or activities, to focus the team on identifying key inputs to decision-making and response options. The workshop comprises a simplified approach to the USCG Model Ecological Risk Assessment for Oil Spill Response (Aurand et al., 2000). Similar to the USCG ERA Workshops, these activities promote team discussion and consideration of areas at risk from a hypothetical spill situation and the steps to protect and minimize impacts. Workgroups are assigned a facilitator who is provided with activities guidelines and record-keeping forms, including several ICS forms. Work activities address:

1. Estimation of Oil Trajectory and Fate
2. Defining Environmental and Human Resources at Risk
3. Defining Spill Response Objectives and Key Response
4. Defining the Tactics and Critical Success Factors for the Response Options

For each activity, an initial step is to complete a questionnaire on information sources for the subject including:

- Names of persons/institutions with specific knowledge pertinent to each activity (these become local “experts”)
- Information / tools used or available to address each activity (i.e., modeling, software, GIS systems, other emergency management programs, etc.)

Workgroups then undertake activities and record results in handouts that include standard oil spill response ICS forms including 201 – Initial Response, 202 Response Objectives, 232 – Resources at Risk, and 215 – Planning Worksheet. These fundamental tools provide participants with a grasp of the type of information that would be sought for spill response and how it might be organized within an emergency response center.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Six workshops have been successfully completed in the past 4 years, meeting the typical objectives to:

- build a local oil spill response strategy based on a probable and significant spill scenario for the country;
- develop and train a local oil spill response committee on contingency planning involving all stakeholders touched directly or indirectly by the oil spill scenario;
- develop support agency cooperation at the local level and improve links between all stakeholders, including industries, NGOs and governmental institutions;
- introduce the process for developing national contingency plan development, including the development of guidelines for local and sub-national plans;

- provide stakeholders with the opportunity to evaluate the benefits. Limitations, and drawbacks of spill response strategies such as dispersant use, in-situ burning and mechanical response;
- provide guidance to the lead agency and the national oil spill response committee in order to finish the drafting of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan in a regionally harmonized form to facilitate future cooperation; and
- heighten awareness for authorities regarding the ratification and implementation of regional and international conventions.

Workshop activities entail specific aspects of response awareness and decision-making using a plausible significant spill scenario for the point of discussion and assumptions. Results of the activities provide immediate content for oil spill response contingency planning and illustrate how a scenario-based approach can be used to build key information for national and regional spill contingency plans.

Leadership and focal points for national planning efforts bear the responsibility to continue the efforts for national planning with pertinent stakeholders. At the time of this presentation three of the six nations where workshops have been held have completed drafts of their national oil spill response plans.

## **REFERENCES**

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