

Oil Spill Strategies for Protecting our Shorelines

Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) are site-specific plans for responding to oil spills in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The plans are tailored to a specific beach, shore, or water way and are developed to minimize impact on sensitive areas threatened by the spill. Each GRP has two priorities, which are to:

- Pre-identify sensitive natural, cultural or significant economic resources; and
- Give responders directions

GRP strategies serve as guidelines for responsible parties, federal and state agencies' coordinated efforts and are deployed by private contractors during an oil spill. Each GRP has several chapters with a variety of information that is useful to responders, both in the initial hours and for longer periods of time if a response is sustained.

How are the GRPs used?

A GRP is considered the initial "marching orders" for responders, implemented without delay while responders also act to contain the oil and recovery it off the surface of the water. Then over time, the GRP protection strategies are refined and supplemented based on real-time assessments.

Although the goal is to protect all resources, it may be necessary to prioritize some areas in order to minimize the impact on others during an oil spill. For example, boom may be used to concentrate spilled material so that it is easily collected. This strategy may result in oiling a beach where the impact is less damaging than oiling a herring breeding area or an area of cultural sensitivity.

The sites selected for consideration of GRPs are not meant to be exclusive. The fact that a GRP has not been developed for a sensitive site does not imply that the site should not be protected during a spill. GRP development can benefit sites where no GRP are in place, because the tools and experience that are used to develop a GRP can also be transferred to non-GRP sites.

How are the GRPs developed?

GRPs are developed through public workshops involving federal, state, and local oil spill emergency response experts. Representatives from tribes, industry, ports, environmental



organizations, community members and response contractors participate as well. Workshop participants identify resources at risk of spills, develop operational strategies, and identify available spill response personnel and equipment in the area. The information is then compiled and published as annexes to the Northwest Area Contingency Plan.

GRPs are intended to be flexible and to allow spill responders to modify them, as necessary, to fit the prevailing conditions. Several factors may be in play that limits the effectiveness of GRP strategies such as:

- **Type of product:** Some GRPs have been designed for use when persistent oil products are spilled (heavier, black oil) and may not be suitable for other petroleum or hazardous substances.
- **Weather Conditions:** Environmental conditions (wind, currents, and tides), together with the limitations of existing spill response technology, may prevent the effective protection of some areas.

How are the GRPs tested?

Oil spill response contractors and other responders frequently test GRP strategies during drills and use them during spills. Testing provides an opportunity for response contractors to verify effectiveness, deploy equipment and train personnel to ensure that they are prepared for a real oil spill. GRP strategies are updated based on the results of the drills.

Where can I find out the GRPs?

Current versions of the GRPs are posted on the Northwest Area Committee/Regional Response Team website at: <http://www.rrt10nwac.com/>, together with links to the WDOE, ODEQ, USCG and the EPA websites.

