

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SYMPOSIUM AND FIELD EXERCISE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Division of Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) facilitated the planning and execution of the Alaska Shield 2016 Hazmat Symposium and Field Exercise in Anchorage, AK from April 5-6, 2016. The Hazardous material (Hazmat) component of Alaska Shield was sponsored by the Statewide Hazardous Materials Response Team, DEC, and the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM), co-sponsored by Alaska West Express, and hosted by the Anchorage Municipal Fire Department.

The training and exercises focused on common threats to the region. The classroom training, vendor show and functional field exercise was held at the Anchorage Fire Training Center on April 5-6. Over 90 people attended the symposium which provided classroom style presentations which included presentations on responding to methanol and compressed flammable gas releases, air monitoring, hazmat response priorities, "home chemist" hazmat awareness, hazmat safety for first responders, and hazmat team activation.

For the field exercise, the Statewide Hazmat Response Teams from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kodiak, Juneau, Ketchikan, and support teams from 103rd Civil Support Team (CST), and EPA responded in Level A suits (fully encapsulated chemical protective suit with supplied air) to three separate simulated releases of extremely hazardous substances (EHS). Other participants included the Alaska Division of Spill Prevention and Response, Alaska Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Alaska Railroad, National Guard - Homeland Response Force - (FEMA Region X) from Washington, Air National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Sector Anchorage Incident Management Division, and industry representatives. Nine hazmat vendors also attended the event. Presentations, photos, and other meeting materials will be available soon at the DEC Hazmat website: <http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/hazmat.htm>

Background of Statewide Hazmat Response Team:

In 1996, DEC initiated a hazmat planning effort by forming a work group to develop a statewide Level A response capability in order to maintain and expand oil and hazardous substance spill response capabilities throughout Alaska. The primary members to the work group included the Municipality of Anchorage, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and DEC. The efforts of the group resulted in the formation of a Regional Hazmat Response Team consisting of the Anchorage and Fairbanks Hazmat Teams. Formal local response agreements were negotiated so that both teams were capable of responding beyond their jurisdictional boundaries at the direction of the DEC State On-Scene Coordinator (SOSC). The regional team has expanded and is now called the Statewide Hazardous Materials Response Team and consists of five community Level A response teams from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Kodiak, and other response partners including the 103rd Civil Support Team (CST), the EPA Response Team, and numerous local fire departments that support the Level A teams. The five community teams are all deployable by the DEC SOSC to any location within the State of Alaska that would require a Level A response.

The Statewide Hazmat Response Work Group's goals are to protect public health and the environment from the effects of hazmat releases and to develop, maintain and enhance existing hazmat prevention and response capabilities at a local level. The Statewide Hazmat Response Work Group has continued to grow, and now has over 25 participating entities including; local, State, Federal, military, private and industry hazmat response partners. DEC facilitates the work group meetings three times per year to discuss and update statewide response capabilities, standardizing operating procedures, lessons learned from recent responses, training, exercises, equipment enhancements, decontamination assets, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) contingencies, funding, and other topics of interest.

The Statewide Hazmat Response Work Group and DEC continue to focus on enhancing the overall hazmat response capability in the State which includes the integration of response teams, training opportunities to work together, promoting coordination for a coherent response effort to any hazmat related incident, sustaining a mass decontamination capability, and to improve the working relationship between all hazmat response partners throughout the State.

The purpose of this executive summary is to provide an overview of Alaska Shield Hazmat results, identify strengths to be maintained, build upon potential areas for improvement, and support the development of corrective actions and the Improvement Plan.

The following objectives were developed by the Hazmat exercise planning team for AS-2016 Symposium and Field Exercise:

Objectives:

- Increase the emergency preparedness level of emergency response personnel.
- Increase communication capabilities between Hazmat Teams.
- Integrate National Response Framework and the Incident Command System (ICS).
- Integrate Statewide Hazmat Response Team members in responding to EHS releases.
- Provide a joint training opportunity for the Statewide Hazmat Response Team members to work together and further promote close coordination for a seamless response effort.
- Improve working relationships between Statewide Hazmat Response Team members.
- Improve working relationships with Federal and other Hazmat response partners.

Major Strengths:

1. The Symposium brought instructors from the Fairbanks Hazmat Team, ADEC, EPA Start instructor from Seattle and a presenter from the FBI. Topics were closely related to current Hazmat threats in the State which included methanol, liquid petroleum and chlorine releases and railcar accident involving methanol and diesel.
2. Integration of different team members in the field exercise is an invaluable learning tool and relationship builder. Team members brought varied levels of experience to the team and they were able to assist each other in making the field exercises successful.
3. Communication interoperability between the different response teams and command staff was successful.

Major Areas for Improvement:

1. Strengthen the Incident Command System throughout the hazmat response teams and provide additional training for responders on how the local, state and federal teams would work together under the National Response Framework concept.
2. Identify and overcome transportation restrictions and hurdles for Hazmat responder PPE (specifically SCBA air bottles).
3. Provide assistance for local fire departments to gain more working knowledge of the facilities and threats located in their communities.