

Alaska Department  
of Environmental Conservation

# Community Spill Response

Developing partnerships with local communities to expand Alaska's oil and hazardous substance spill response capabilities and readiness



***Prevention and Emergency Response Program***

## Local Problems, Local Solutions

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Hundreds of oil and hazardous substance spills occur across Alaska every year. Whether from freighters, fishing boats, leaking storage tanks, discarded wastes, abandoned drums, mystery spills, or other sources, these spills can cause serious damage to public health and property as well as to the environment.

Because of the vast size of the state and the remote location of many of its cities and communities, local residents are frequently the first line of defense in responding to oil or hazardous substance releases. In many cases outside responders cannot arrive in time to deal with the immediate impacts, especially a life-threatening release of a hazardous gas such as chlorine or ammonia.

Alaska's communities can play an important role in minimizing the impacts of oil and hazardous substance spills. According to the January 1990 report by the Alaska Oil Spill Commission entitled **Spill: the Wreck of the Exxon Valdez**:

*"A substantive role should be given to the affected communities in any response system ... local interests, local knowledge and experience . . . often made the community-based work force the most efficient available."*

Recognizing the importance of local involvement, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is working with local communities to provide for coordinated and effective response and to expand the network of resources available to protect human health and the environment from the risks associated with oil and hazardous substance spills. By forging partnerships at the local level, both DEC and local residents will be better prepared to respond to these incidents.

## The Community Spill Response Program – Goals

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The Community Spill Response Program is intended to better protect public health and the environment from the effects of oil and hazardous substance releases by:

- Providing for the immediate protection of public health and the environment.
- Developing, augmenting and sustaining first-tier response capability and readiness at the local level.
- Making the local response part of the State response.
- Using local knowledge, experience and resources to the greatest extent possible.
- Fully integrating local oil and hazardous substance response capability into the State's overall response network.



*Response equipment containers provide a first-tier response capability at the local level.*

## How It Works

According to Alaska law, anyone who causes or permits an oil or a hazardous substance spill must clean it up immediately, unless the cleanup is technically infeasible or would cause greater environmental damage or threat to human life or health. Spillers must report the spill to DEC.

The DEC State On-Scene Coordinator (SOSC) determines the feasibility of cleanup and judges the adequacy of the cleanup actions. The SOSC may augment or take over a cleanup that is judged inadequate. DEC must also respond to “orphan spills” – those with no identifiable spiller. The Community Spill Response Program helps to ensure that local resources are available to the SOSC for this purpose. The program is implemented through Community Spill Response Agreements (CSRAs).



DEC has negotiated CSRAs with over fifteen boroughs and municipalities across the State and will be developing additional agreements as needed. The agreements allow DEC to request local assistance based on the needs of a particular incident. There are three important aspects of the agreements:

- **Activation**

If DEC is notified by the spiller or a local authority of a release or threatened release of oil or a hazardous substance which may pose an imminent and substantial threat to public health or the environment, the SOSC may request activation of the CSRA for available local response resources. The SOSC will monitor the adequacy of the response and take whatever additional actions are needed.

- **Reimbursement**

Under State law, actual costs incurred for response actions under a CSRA may be reimbursed by DEC. If the CSRA is activated by the SOSOC, actual expenses for responses both inside and outside of the local jurisdiction can be reimbursed. Specific provisions for billing and reimbursement of expenses are included in the agreement.

- **Identification of Local Resources**

Each agreement has an attachment listing the local resources, including manpower, equipment and other support, which are available for emergency response purposes.



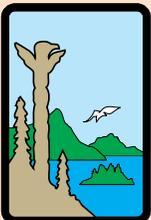
*Training drills are an important part of local response readiness.*

## Building Local Response Capability

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DEC works with those communities which have signed a CSRA to improve preparedness and to identify ways in which local capability may be enhanced and augmented to respond to specific hazards that exist in the area. DEC works with these communities to support local training and additional response equipment needs that have been identified. Training in equipment deployment and use, hazardous waste operations, and other response-related topics may be conducted by DEC or coordinated with other agencies or private contractors. Drill and exercises using local equipment and manpower are also undertaken.

In addition to its work with individual communities through Community Spill Response Agreements, DEC is engaged in statewide projects to enhance local emergency response capability. In coastal areas, nearshore response equipment packages, which may consist of high-speed response vessels, storage barges designed for use with local “vessels of opportunity”, or Conex-type steel containers with containment boom and other response equipment, are being procured and positioned to enhance local spill response capability. In addition, inland response equipment packages have been staged in at-risk areas around the State to provide a mix of specialized tools that can be accessed by DEC responders and local trained personnel in an emergency. DEC is also engaged in the development of a statewide hazardous-materials response strategy, which will build on existing capabilities to provide better protection of public health and the environment from the effects of oil and hazardous substance spills throughout Alaska.



### Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Spill Prevention and Response  
Prevention and Emergency Response Program  
410 Willoughby Ave.  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1795  
(907) 465-5220

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