

## Oil Spill Task Force

*Combining Resources to Protect the Pacific Marine Environment*

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Quarterly Report to our Stakeholders  
December 2002



Photo by Reuters (Handout)

### West Coast Impacts of the Prestige Oil Spill

The massive oil spill now impacting the coast of Spain serves as a warning against complacency. With all that we've accomplished in the US and Canada, and especially here on the West Coast, we must ask ourselves if we've done enough.

The US Coast Guard, the Canadian Coast Guard, and most of our member agencies require that tankers calling on our ports have approved oil spill contingency plans, demonstrate financial responsibility, and have contracts with oil spill response organizations. The TAPS fleet - US-flagged tankers that bring Alaskan crude oil to refineries on the West Coast - is subject to a stringent inspection program focused on specific problems that develop from plying their routes through the Gulf of Alaska. Tanker operators and oil spill responders must participate in drills and exercises, and

our member agencies are increasingly focusing on unannounced drills to test their readiness.

Recommendations from the West Coast Offshore Vessel Traffic Risk Management Project Workgroup that all tankers carrying persistent product or crude oil stay at least 50 miles offshore until entering a port are now being implemented. If needed, the member agencies of the Oil Spill Task Force have mutual aid agreements which facilitate sharing of both public and private resources on the West Coast. In addition, we are initiating a conversation with West Coast tanker operators to discuss voluntary management and operating standards that go beyond regulatory requirements.

But is all that enough? If an aging tanker were passing our coastline in "innocent passage," so that it was not required to meet any of our planning, financial proof, or drill/exercise requirements, and then experienced hull failure, would we be just as vulnerable as Spain? The Task Force's Coordinating Committee will be meeting with Marine Safety Officers from the US Coast Guard Pacific Area in January, and together, we plan to address this issue.

One topic of particular interest is that of "places [ports] of refuge." This came up over a year ago when nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea refused to allow the stricken tanker *Castor* to come ashore for lightering and repairs; fortunately this was eventually accomplished at sea. The world was not so lucky when Spain refused to allow the *T/V Prestige* to seek refuge. In the wake of the *Prestige* disaster, the International Maritime Organization has fast-tracked efforts to develop decision-making guidelines to deal

with such cases, and will call on the US and Canada to develop plans or procedures for dealing with such instances. As a regional organization representing all the West Coast states and the Province of British Columbia, the Task Force is in a unique position to both facilitate and participate in such a discussion regarding the West Coast of North America.

**We would like to hear from you on this issue.** What further steps could be taken to prevent a *Prestige*-type incident on the West Coast? What issues need to be considered when discussing the risks associated with providing a place of refuge for any stricken vessel – after all, every ship carries fuel oils – versus turning it out to sea? Please send your email comments to the Task Force Executive Coordinator, Jean Cameron, at the following email address: [JeanRCameron@oregoncoast.com](mailto:JeanRCameron@oregoncoast.com)

## **The Task Force Honors Jim McCracken**



Photo courtesy of Lobban Photography

Jim McCracken, a victim of the double murder-suicide in Kamloops, BC on October 15th, was Director of the environmental protection program that included the Emergency Response section of the Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection which participates in the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force.

Jim represented the Ministry at the Task Force's Annual Meeting this past summer. During the meeting, he moderated a panel session on the role of government vis-à-vis the private sector in establishing the right environmental actions. With severe cutbacks facing BC's government, this balance was one which Jim, like all government employees, was seeking.

The Members of the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force are tremendously saddened by Jim's death. His commitment to asking tough questions and finding the right answers will be a loss for the entire Pacific Region as well as for the people of the Province of British Columbia. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and to our associates at the Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection.

## **Long Range Planning Initiated**

The Members of the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force and their Coordinating Committee delegates met with the Executive Coordinator at SeaTac Airport in Washington on November 14<sup>th</sup> to participate in a Long Range Planning retreat. Our goal was to reach consensus on general program directions for the Oil Spill Task Force for the next five years.

These program decisions will provide guidance for the Task Force member agencies and staff in drafting and adopting a new Strategic Plan for the period beginning in August of 2004. The Long Range Planning retreat also allowed the Task Force Members to clarify their staffing needs for the next five years relevant to these program goals, prior to initiation of the 2003-2005 staff contract process.

The Task Force principals reviewed the oil handling and transportation system on the West Coast as well as past projects and programs sponsored by the Task Force. They determined that all projects initiated by the Task Force had involved some

degree of interagency coordination and information sharing among member agencies. In addition, 58% of all projects addressed oil movement by vessels, 37% addressed oil movement by pipelines, 32% addressed oil storage and handling facilities, 21% impacted oil spills from transport by railroads and tank trucks, 26% directly addressed wildlife protection and environmental restoration, and 66% included some element of stakeholder outreach and involvement.

After reviewing spill data and program priorities for each member agency, the Task Force and Coordinating Committee members agreed to address the following projects in the next Strategic Plan:

- Under the Spill Prevention Objective, the Task Force will continue its focus on tankers and tank barges, non-tank vessels, oil transfers, oil handling facilities, and recreational vessels. They will also continue to prioritize implementation of a Regional Spills Database. In addition, they agreed to focus on building salvage/rescue tug capability on the West Coast, finding illegal oil/water separator bypass systems, pollution from cruise ships, and oil spills from railroads, vehicles, and pipelines. They will also track the risk assessment being developed for wreck removals, and will promote installation of more oily water reception facilities.
- Under their Spill Preparedness/Response Objective, the Task Force will focus on two categories of effort: ensuring response capability and building state/provincial partnerships with US and Canadian federal agencies. Specifically, they will address drills/exercises, the 2004 SONS exercise, use of alternative response technologies, improving the contingency planning process, and building response capability for non-tank vessels. The Task Force will also promote coordination of oil spill R&D, effective transboundary

response, and hazardous material response and preparedness. OSRO oversight, natural resource damage assessment, and development of a tactics manual are also on their list. They also expect to track and comment on federal rule proposals, to clarify the role of Unified Command/ICS in response to terrorist scenarios, oil spill planning as part of security planning, and the need for increased state roles if federal agencies must do less oil spill response due to increased security demands.

- Under their Communications objective, the Task Force will continue to host annual meetings and topic-specific roundtables each year, sponsor the Legacy Awards program, maintain a web site, and publish an annual report, quarterly reports, and an annual workplan. They will continue their effort to meet with US and Canadian federal agencies each year, to invite stakeholders to participate on project workgroups as appropriate, and to take advantage of stakeholder outreach opportunities as they arise.

The Task Force Members recognize, of course, that these goals set general direction only, and will stay open to additional projects and recommendations from stakeholders during the more formal strategic planning process expected next year. The retreat participants agreed to continue to use full-time contracted staff. The next staff contract will be managed by the Washington Department of Ecology.

#### **And in other Task Force news,**

- The Task Force will be working with the California Office of Spill Prevention and Response to sponsor an incident investigator training course by Det Norske Veritas focused on developing causal information consistent with the data dictionary which the Task Force is

incorporating into a regional database. The training will be held in Sacramento, CA on February 25<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup> and is open to the Task Force member agencies, as well as US and Canadian federal agencies and other West Coast state agencies involved in oil spill incident investigations.

- The Task Force will also be sponsoring a topic specific Roundtable again this year, probably in early March. Past Roundtables have focused on the movement of response equipment and Natural Resource Damage Assessments. The date, location, and topic will be finalized by the Coordinating Committee at their January meeting. **Stay Tuned for more information!**

- With recent gubernatorial changes in Hawaii and Alaska, we anticipate working with new Task Force members from those states. Alaska Governor Frank Murkowski has announced the appointment of Ernesta Ballard as Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation, a position that includes serving as Alaska's Task Force Member. Ernesta Ballard's career has included senior management positions in both the public and private sectors. She was Regional Administrator of Region 10 of the United States Environmental Protection Agency from 1983-86. Ernesta moved to Alaska in 1989 to become CEO of the Cape Fox Corporation. She holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania, attended Oxford University on a Thouron Scholarship, and received an MBA from Harvard University. Ms. Ballard has worked with ADEC on a number of projects including contaminated site cleanups and their recent cruise ship initiative. We wish the very best to Michele Brown, who served as our Task Force member from Alaska while Commissioner for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), and Gary Gill, who, as Deputy Director for Environmental Health at the Hawaii Department of Health, was our Task Force member from Hawaii.

- During a trip to Washington DC in October, Task Force Executive Coordinator Jean Cameron briefed new staff in the US Coast Guard Office of Response on the

Task Force, met with NOAA's Office of Coast Pilot regarding implementation of the recommendations from the West Coast Offshore Vessel Traffic Risk Management project Workgroup, and briefed API's Spills Advisory Group on the Offshore Traffic project and other Task Force initiatives.

#### **The Task Force Member Agencies**

- **The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation**  
Contact Larry Dietrick at 907-465-5255
- **The British Columbia Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection**  
Contact Heather Taylor at 250-952-4870
- **The Washington Department of Ecology**  
Contact Stan Norman at 360-407-7465
- **The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality**  
Contact Mike Zollitsch at 503-229-6931
- **The Office of Spill Prevention and Response, California Department of Fish and Game**  
Contact Scott Schaefer at 916-445-9326
- **The Office of Hazards Evaluation and Emergency Response in the Hawaii Department of Environmental Health;**  
Contact Curtis Martin at 808-586-4249

Task Force member agency web sites may be accessed through the Task Force web site

**For more information on any topics noted above, please contact Jean Cameron, Task Force Executive Coordinator, at 503-392-5860 (phone/fax), or through email at:**

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**<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/eeeb/taskforc/tfhome.htm>**

**The Members and staff of the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force wish all our stakeholders the Happiest of Holidays and a New Year free of oil spills!**