

Changing Oil Movement

The Pacific Northwest region is experiencing rapid changes in how crude oil is moved to our refineries, through our rail corridors, and to Washington ports for exportation to other west coast refineries. Oil companies are finding new ways to keep up with supply and demand. Moving crude oil by rail from oil fields in the Dakotas means a different type of oil is coming to our state — adding increased potential for oil spills where previously none existed and a change in marine water traffic. These changes are affecting community, environmental, and economic risks associated with oil spills. Our state’s oil spill prevention and readiness programs must evolve in response to these changes.

Shifting Risks

Currently the Pacific Northwest region lacks adequate prevention and preparedness planning along the inland rail corridors. The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) does not have adequate expertise in risk assessment related to increased rail and vessel traffic. Therefore, the agency is requesting funding to develop readiness plans and expertise to respond to the shifting risk related to the increase of crude oil moved by rail and vessels.

Planning and Responding

The funding will allow for the development of more than 50 additional geographic response plans (GRP) along rail corridors where no such plans exist today. GRPs are special response plans that (1) identify sensitive natural, cultural or significant economic resources, and (2) identify specific response strategies to minimize injury to sensitive resources. GRPs have long been a part of Washington’s response system and are proven to reduce damages to natural or economic resources that are at risk from spills. These plans ensure that there are no delays in responding if crude oil is spilled.

WHY IT MATTERS

Historically crude oil was imported to Washington mainly by way of vessels from Alaska. Transporting crude oil by rail poses risks Ecology has not focused on before.

Knowing the lay of the land, potential resources for clean up and response, and responder awareness of oil properties are all important factors Ecology needs to be familiar with. This will allow Ecology to adequately prepare, prevent, and respond to oil spills by rail.

Assessing how additional vessel traffic could increase oil spill risks is vital to the mission of a rapid, aggressive, and well-coordinated response.

Contact information

Linda Pilkey-Jarvis
360-407-7447
Jpil461@ecy.wa.gov

Lisa Copeland
360-407-6990
Lcop461@ecy.wa.gov

Special accommodations

If you need this document in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology Spills Program at 360-407-7455.

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Assess and Protect

The funding also provides the necessary expertise to address prevention, preparedness and response gaps by identifying factors associated with increased vessel and rail traffic. The safe movement of oil, and ensuring first responders are aware and equipped when responding to the different types of oil products spilled, is important to the state's health and environment.

Crude oil transport by rail will decrease the number of imports by vessel. As oil is moved through our ports for exporting, the marine traffic will increase in other ways. Assessing marine risks, along with mitigating and managing potential risks, is vital to successful prevention and response plans.

Fiscal Detail

The 2014 supplemental budget request for approximately \$650,000 outlines five full-time equivalents (FTEs) to address the issues brought forth by the increase of transporting crude by rail in Washington. This amount covers salaries, benefits and associated costs to staff these positions through the 2013-2015 biennium.

3 FTEs for Local Response Plans

These FTEs will develop, test, and maintain needed GRPs in the inland areas along the rail corridors. Ecology has prepared for this opportunity by applying Lean principles to the GRP process and modernized the tools and methods used to create the plans. As many as 100 field visits per plan, as well as community meetings, will be needed to document conditions and create oil spill response tactics for specific locations. Once developed, strategies in each GRP will be tested through drills and maintained over time to ensure they include the most up-to-date information.

1 Rail FTE

This FTE will focus on inland crude oil transport by rail by:

- Evaluating federal and state regulatory structure of crude oil movement by rail to document the gaps.
- Gathering data on the growing number of transfers of crude oil from rail to oil terminals.
- Developing targeted policy or statutory changes for the 2015 legislative session and future sessions.

1 Marine FTE

This FTE will focus on marine and river oil spill risk assessment and prevention by:

- Conducting vessel traffic risk assessments to identify gaps in the system.
- Seeking voluntary actions that may be used in the development of standards of care and best industry practices.
- Developing targeted policy or statutory changes for the 2015 legislative session and future sessions.