

# Spill SCENE

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Washington State Department of Ecology

## Excellent response earns drill waiver

# Paper Mill Spill Proves Value of Plans

What is the value of spill contingency and spill response plans? It's a question often debated by spill responders and contingency planners. Are the plans actually used during a real spill or do they just sit on the shelf? How can you plan for every contingency when each spill is different?

Real-life events, however, can show that those "seldom-used" plans required by law may play a more important role than first believed. Just ask the Port Townsend Paper Company in Port Townsend, WA. On September 10, the Port Townsend Paper Mill had a 600 gallon spill of reprocessed fuel oil. A portion of this spill reached the water at Port Townsend Bay, triggering the mill to activate their Oil Spill Contingency Plan. But due to good planning and quick, well-coordinated work, the mill personnel were able to prevent significant environmental damage. In fact, the mill's response went so well that Ecology has waived a future required drill.

Al Gould, who maintains the mill's Contingency Plan commented, "...this C-Plan and training efforts by Ecology and the mill personnel really paid off during this spill. We actually knew what to do and it worked. That makes me feel good."

A mill employee noticed oil in the water on the east shore of the site

at approximately 0620. He contacted his supervisor who immediately called the mill foreman, who alerted the emergency response team over the mill radio. The emergency response team began deploying absorbent boom at approximately 0700. By 0810 mill personnel had deployed an additional 1000 feet of hard curtain boom.

By 0800, Ed Danner, the mill's Incident Commander, had notified the response contractors and federal, state and local agencies. In the spill

debriefing later, Danner said the notifications went quickly because "...I followed the plan. The major problem was staying on the line to answer all of the questions when I know I have other notification calls to make."

Employees responded to this spill as they practiced in their annual drills. These drills have triggered much of the debate on the value of the state's required planning process. Contingency planners insist that **See PLANS, page 2**

## Ecology Honors SeaRiver



*SeaRiver Maritime Inc. is the first company to receive the Washington's Exceptional Compliance Program (ECOPRO) award for excellence in tank vessel safety and environmental stewardship. Shown here are (l to r) Captain Tom Hill, SeaRiver, Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons, SeaRiver President Gus Elmer, and Captain I. A. (John) Karakoulakis, SeaRiver. The company exceeded Washington's Best Achievable Protection standards for tankers in 30 of 31 categories.*

## **PLANS, continued from page 1**

drafting an oil spill contingency plan, and holding frequent drills to test the plan, helps a facility to be better prepared if a spill occurs. Facilities often counter by saying the cost of the drills outweigh the benefit. They say the drills are hypothetical situations and hold no value when everyone knows what is happening and is play-acting just to get the drill over.

Eric Heinitz, head of Ecology's response unit for southwest Washington, said that several years ago this was the attitude of Port Townsend Paper Company. "The initial drills and the first Contingency Plan prepared by the mill were less than adequate, Heinitz said. "It took a series of meetings and failing to pass a drill for the company to realize the state is serious about these requirements."

During the last two years, Port Townsend Paper Mill worked hard to bring itself up to passing levels. They hired a consultant and contractor to help plan their next drill, and brought in Ecology staff to help train personnel on Incident Command. As a result, they passed their drill last year. The real test of their preparedness came with the actual spill.

## **Around the Program**

**Rule-making:** The Spills Program will focus on two rule-making activities in 2000. We are beginning the process of amending the rules for facility and vessel oil spill contingency plans (Ch. 173-181 WAC and Ch. 317-10 WAC). These rules were adopted in 1991 and 1993. They need to be updated to reflect the lessons learned from the first full cycle of plan review and approval, and oil spill response drills. Also, the North Puget Sound Risk Management Plan being developed by the Coast Guard/Ecology panel may include

After notifications went out, the mill's response personnel quickly designated a Command Center, and established an Incident Command System for management. Heinitz was Ecology's On-Scene Coordinator for the spill response. "Everyone knew their roles," he recalled later. "When I entered the Command Post at the mill at approximately 1000 that morning I was able to quickly assess the actions the mill was taking to respond to this spill. All the Incident Command forms were correctly filled out and posted for everyone to see. There was a good map of the spill area and drawing of the actions taken and resources on scene."

An incident command briefing was held at 1100 and a Unified Command was established with Ecology, Coast Guard and Port Townsend Paper Co. involved. Then a set of Incident Objectives was produced and the Planning section started to develop the first Incident Action Plan for the next 24 hours of cleanup. A draft press release was also written.

The key players met again September 21 to debrief about the response and discuss possible

recommendations for state rule-making. If it does, we want to be prepared to move forward quickly on those recommendations.

**Comings and Goings: John Jenicek**, supervisor of the Columbia River Field Office in Portland, Oregon, has left state service to work for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. He is an operations manager based in Florida.

**Joe Subsits**, facility prevention plan reviewer at Headquarters office, has moved on to the Washington Utilities and Trade Commission, where he works with pipelines.

improvements. The debriefing is another requirement of the Contingency Plan and Incident Command System. One lesson learned was that the small skiff was too small to handle the larger containment boom, something Ecology has commented on during several deployment drills. Two days before this spill, Port Townsend Paper Co. held a boom deployment drill which went well and they were scheduled to have a tabletop exercise later that month. After seeing the organization and effort put into this response, Ecology gave Port Townsend Paper Mill credit for their tabletop exercise, helping them meet both the Federal and State mandatory drill requirements. The required tabletop exercise for this year was waived.

## **Spill** SCENE

**Spill Scene** is published by the Washington State Department of Ecology to provide information on oil and hazardous substance spill prevention, preparedness and response. We welcome your comments and questions. Call (360) 407-7211 or write: Editor, **Spill Scene**, Department of Ecology, Spills Program, P.O. Box 47701, Olympia, WA 98504-7701.

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# NRDA Dollars Buy Pristine Habitat

The eelgrass beds of Fidalgo Bay in north Puget Sound will shelter and feed herring and baby Dungeness crab for years to come, thanks to a conservation easement paid for by the Coastal Protection Fund.

The 450 acres of pristine intertidal land in southern Fidalgo Bay, southeast of Anacortes, WA, is some of the most productive habitat in the area, according to Dale Davis. Davis helps run Ecology's Natural Resource Damage Assessment program.

"It's not really worth much commercially unless it were dredged, but as a natural resource, it has really high value," Davis said. "It's a really valuable, high quality natural habitat, and there's not very much of that left." He said there has been extensive sampling done in the Bay showing that it is an uncontaminated area, still healthy,



*Eelgrass provides some of the richest living space for marine life in Puget Sound.*

and a vital resource.

As an intertidal area, Fidalgo Bay is flooded at high tide, but when the tide goes out much of the bay empties, exposing miles of mud flats. This allows large eelgrass meadows to grow. The eelgrass meadows are used as a nursery by salmon, crab, surf smelt, and herring. The worms, shrimp, crab and other tiny "critters" that make

their home in the eelgrass in turn provide food for larger fish, eagles and shorebirds, including a nearby great blue heron rookery.

The Coastal Protection Fund, which provided \$275,000 to purchase the property, comes from resource damage assessments and penalties for oil spills to marine waters. The Fund is also used to restore habitat that has either been damaged directly by a spill or otherwise degraded. While habitat restoration is valuable, Davis sees the Fidalgo Bay land purchase as even more worthy.

"When we can actually purchase property and protect it forever, it's a better use of the dollars," he said. Much of the money for the Fidalgo Bay purchase came from the damage assessment from the 1994 CROWLEY 101 barge oil spill off the San Juan Islands.

## Pipeline Explosion Update

On June 10, 1999, an Olympic Pipe Line Co. underground pipe ruptured in Bellingham, eventually dumping about 280,000 gallons of fuel into Whatcom Creek. Within a few hours, a spark ignited the spill, turning nearly two miles of Whatcom Creek into a corridor of fire that killed three youth and devastated much of Whatcom Falls park.

The fire and resulting damage killed an estimated 10,000 fish in Whatcom Creek, along with lamprey, birds, insects and other wildlife. The cause of the rupture and spill is still under investigation.

Since the explosion, Ecology has overseen and been involved in virtually every aspect of emergency

spill response, cleanup and creek restoration. On December 18, the Joint Oversight Committee (Ecology, EPA, City of Bellingham and Olympic Pipe Line Co.) concluded the official emergency response phase of the cleanup. During the last six months:

- ◆ About 1,000 gallons of fuel has been recovered.

- ◆ About 6,500 cubic yards of contaminated soil has been removed and replaced.

- ◆ Thousands of feet of PVC pipe and 16 underground vapor extraction wells have been installed to continue product venting.

- ◆ Fallen trees were placed along creek banks. The banks were hydromulched to prevent

erosion and stabilize gravel in the stream.

- ◆ By October, grasses, ferns and salal were making a comeback, while invasive plants like Canadian thistle and reed canary grass are being removed.

- ◆ Trees in the burn zone will be monitored through spring 2000 to determine which scorched trees will recover – many maples have already sprouted new growth.

- ◆ About 30 new salmon spawning pools have been built, along with new creek meanders and installation of large woody debris.

- ◆ Nearly 6,000 lbs. of metal debris was pulled out of the creek during cleanup.

# Upcoming Events



*Ecology welcomes submittals of notices of public events related to oil and hazardous substance spill*

*prevention, preparedness and response. Ecology reserves the right to select events for publication. Please contact Mariann Cook Andrews at (360) 407-7211 (e-mail: [maco461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:maco461@ecy.wa.gov)) for more information regarding submittal deadlines.*

## **February 9 – 10 a.m.**

Puget Sound Marine Comm.  
Port of Seattle Bldg.  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Dave Schneider, (206) 728-3523

## **February 10 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf. Rm.  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Peggy Larson, (206) 515-3904

## **February 17-18**

North Puget Sound Risk Mgmt. Panel  
Ecology Headquarters, Auditorium  
Lacey, WA  
Contact: Jon Neel, (360) 407-6905

## **March 3**

Olympic Coast National Marine  
Sanctuary Advisory Council  
TBA  
Contact: Nancy Beres, (360) 457-6622

## **March 8 -- 9 a.m.**

Resource Damage Assessment Comm.  
Ecology Headquarters Bldg., R0A-36  
Lacey, WA  
Contact: Dale Davis, (360) 407-6972

## **March 9 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf. Rm.  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Peggy Larson, (206) 515-3904

## **March 15-16**

North Puget Sound Risk Mgmt. Panel  
NOAA  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Jon Neel, (360) 407-6905

## **April 5 – 10 a.m.**

Puget Sound Marine Comm.  
Port of Seattle Bldg.  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Dave Schneider, (206) 728-3523

## **April 13 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf. Rm.  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: Peggy Larson, (206) 515-3904