

Geographic Response Plans

Oil spill strategies for protecting our shorelines

Published and maintained separately as annexes to the Northwest

Area Contingency Plan, Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) are part of the hierarchy of plans that guide responses to oil spills in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Each GRP is written for a specific area (for example a river, a lake, or section of Puget Sound), and



includes tactical response strategies tailored to a particular shore or waterway at risk of injury from oil.

GRPs have two main objectives:

- Pre-identify sensitive resources at risk of injury from oil spills.
- Help direct response actions related to sensitive resource protection during the initial hours of a response.

The plans help coordinate response efforts by the responsible party and federal and state agencies. Strategies in the plan are deployed by responders after the immediate concern of controlling and containing the source of a spill has been addressed. GRPs contain maps and descriptions of natural, cultural, and economic resources, and then identify strategies to reduce harm to those resources. GRPs also prioritize which response strategies should be implemented based on the location of the spill, and are used along with spill trajectory and real-time information when available.

How are GRPs used?

After controlling and containing oil at or near the spill source, GRPs are the initial “marching orders” for responders to take immediate action to reduce the oil’s impact on sensitive resources. Over time, GRPs are tested and revised based on lessons learned through oil spill drills and actual incidents. Although the ultimate goal would be to protect all resources at risk from oil spills, some areas must be prioritized over others. GRPs include tables that describe the order

WHY IT MATTERS

Washington State is rich with natural, cultural, and economic resources found throughout its waters and shorelines. When oil spills into our waterways, Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) provide immediate information about sensitive resources in the area of the spill and prioritize response strategies to reduce injury to these vulnerable resources. GRPs do not include information on every resource that might need protection, but they do help direct the early hours of a response beyond control and containment of the spill at or near its source.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-7455.

Persons with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. Persons with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

which strategies should be implemented based on the sensitivity of different resources and their proximity to locations where oil spills might occur. For example, boom might be used to concentrate oil along a specific beach or shoreline so it can be recovered off the water by skimmers or vacuum trucks; while this would result in that stretch of shoreline being oiled, it would help to keep the oil from moving downstream towards a more sensitive area, such as an important wildlife habitat or cultural site.

GRP response strategies cannot be all-inclusive, as they are meant to be implemented quickly during the early hours of a response when time is a critical factor. The fact that a GRP response strategy has not been developed for a sensitive site does not imply that the site has no value, or that it should not be protected during a spill. As a response evolves, an Incident Action Plan (IAP) will be developed to identify additional response strategies and other tactics that might reduce the risk of injury to sensitive locations not identified by GRPs.

How are GRPs developed?

GRPs are developed through community-wide efforts that involve input from public workshops, local oil spill and emergency response experts, federal and state agencies, as well as representatives from tribes, industry, ports, environmental organizations, and others. GRP development involves locating resources at risk from spills, designing tactical response strategies for each site, and identifying support locations such as staging areas and boat launches. Each proposed site is typically visited and evaluated for response potential. The GRP data is then compiled and published as a draft, usually followed by a 30-day public comment period. After all comments have been reviewed and considered, a final version of the GRP is published and maintained separately as an annex to the Northwest Area Contingency Plan.

GRPs are intended to be flexible, allowing spill responders to modify them as necessary to fit the prevailing conditions. Several factors may limit the effectiveness of GRP strategies as they are written, such as:

- **Type of product:** The tactical response strategies described in the GRPs are designed for use with persistent oil products, such as diesel

fuel and other oils that float and remain floating on the water's surface. GRP response strategies may not be suitable for heavier petroleum products or hazardous substances.

- **Weather Conditions:** Environmental conditions (wind, currents, and tides), together with the limitations of existing spill response technology, may prevent the effective protection of some areas.

How are GRPs tested?

Oil spill response contractors and other responders frequently test GRP strategies during oil spill drills. Testing the strategies provides an opportunity for response contractors to verify effectiveness, deploy equipment and train personnel to ensure that they are prepared for a real oil spill. During a real spill event, debriefs are held to discuss GRP deployments and capture lessons learned. GRP strategies are added, modified, or removed based on the lessons learned during drills and spills.

Where can I find GRPs?



Current versions of the GRPs are posted on Ecology's website at:
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/preparedness/GRP/index.html

GRPs for Washington, Idaho, and Oregon can be found on the Northwest Area Committee/Regional Response Team 10 website at:
<http://rrt10nwac.com/GRP/Default.aspx>