

Drills identify flaws, while aiming for perfection

Of course, we'll never be perfect. But drill exercises are designed to identify what's likely to work well—and what might not—during an actual event, in a safe and controlled setting. The goal is to work out the problem areas before we are faced with a real emergency. Today, drills fulfill several functions: first, to verify or test an operator's response readiness and effectiveness; second, to exercise all areas of the contingency plan to ground truth its effectiveness; and third, to improve the operator's ability to respond to a real incident by allowing the incident management team to practice the plan's procedures and implement lessons learned.

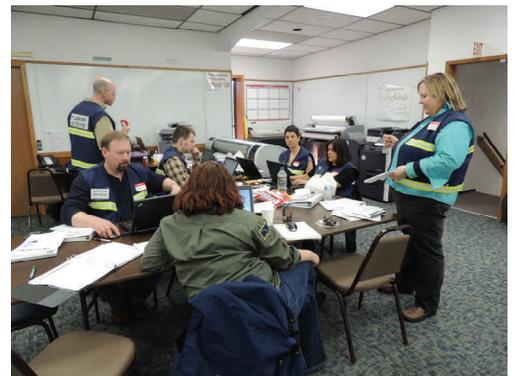
In April, Cook Inlet RCAC's directors of operations and public outreach worked with state, federal and industry partners on an oil spill scenario for Cook Inlet Pipe Line that was designed to test the Cook Inlet Pipe Line Company-Hilcorp Emergency Response Team's proficiency in executing the Incident Command System (ICS) protocols.

The scenario consisted of a ruptured storage tank at the Drift River Oil Terminal. About 60 people participated in the exercise, including staff from Hilcorp Alaska, Cook Inlet Pipeline Company, the U.S. Coast Guard, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response Inc. (CISPRI), and The Response Group, which was responsible for keeping the flow of Operations, Logistics, and Resources moving.

Under state regulation, the ADEC may conduct announced and unannounced exercises to assure the Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan (C-Plan) is adequate in content and execution. The State requires that C-plans be exercised at least twice in a 12-month period. Plan holders may also conduct regularly scheduled training exercises which may be considered a discharge exercise if ADEC monitors, evaluates, or participates in the exercise and considers it to be equivalent with a department-conducted discharge exercise.

Cook Inlet RCAC participates in the Incident Command System for the Cook Inlet stakeholders it represents. During this drill exercise, Director of Operations Steve "Vinnie" Catalano provided technical expertise and assistance as a member of the Operations Section; Director of Public Outreach Lynda Giguere served in the Joint Information Center, funneling information to stakeholders through emails and updates posted on the Cook Inlet RCAC website on a page specifically designated for oil spill response.

Although the scenario could have been more challenging, in this case keeping it uncomplicated was intentional to allow the incident management team to thoroughly understand their roles within the ICS. Overall, the exercise was considered successful in achieving its goals.





We observed the operations section as they worked through the safety precautions that would allow responders access to the affected areas of the facility. Staff was able to provide advice on safety measures and tactics to recover oil contaminated snow and demonstrate the Cook Inlet Response Tool (CIRT) to members of the Response Group and Hilcorp's Incident Management Team. While the CIRT provided limited information for this particular response effort, it was apparent that there is a wide range of information available to assist any response.

Working in the Joint Information Center gave us the opportunity to test Cook Inlet RCAC's ability to keep board members and stakeholders informed of the response through frequent updates via email and the Cook Inlet RCAC website. In a real event, Facebook and Twitter accounts would also be utilized to promote the sharing of information, photographs and breaking news.



Future drills are planned for this summer, including an exercise with Hilcorp Alaska in Soldotna on July 25, and on August 25 with Tesoro at the CISPRI facility in Nikiski.

(Drill photos by L. Giguere)