

Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management

2015 Refugio Oil Spill After-Action Report and Improvement Plan



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July 19, 2016

Summary Process

- ◆ **Hagerty Consulting, Inc. (Hagerty) was engaged by the County of Santa Barbara in March of 2016 to support the after-action review process.**
 - ◆ Authority to conduct the review is established in the *California Emergency Services Act* and California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Subdivision 4, Office of Oil Spill Response, Chapter 5.
- ◆ **The review process began in 2015 by the County prior to engagement of Hagerty.**
 - ◆ Three debrief sessions were conducted by the County, including sessions with County stakeholders, local governments, and non-governmental partners.
- ◆ **Hagerty's independent review of findings includes event documentation and direct feedback from stakeholders.**
 - ◆ March 18 to April 8: Collect information and relevant documentation.
 - ◆ March 18 to April 8: Review relevant documentation.
 - ◆ April 6 to May 31: Conduct group and one-on-one meetings with various stakeholders.
 - ◆ April 4 to June 10: Develop first draft after-action report (AAR).
 - ◆ June 10 to June 30: Review draft AAR with County stakeholders.

Summary Process

After-Action Report Purpose

- ◆ To assess the overall response of Santa Barbara County, documenting strengths, areas for improvement, and corrective actions specific to planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise capabilities.

After-Action Process

- ◆ The process for developing and finalizing the AAR was collaborative and intentionally iterative and was crafted to offer stakeholders across and within Santa Barbara County the opportunity to provide their input to increase the capability of the County to respond to a future oil spill.

After-Action Report Organization

- ◆ Executive Summary
- ◆ Incident Overview
- ◆ Description of Data Sources
- ◆ Analysis
 - ◆ Strengths, Areas for Improvement, References, Analysis, Recommendations
- ◆ Appendices
 - ◆ Improvement Plan, After-Action Meeting Participants, After-Action Meeting Participant Feedback Data, Debrief Participants, Acronyms and Abbreviations



Primary Strengths

- ◆ **The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County and State of California Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) designates a local on-scene coordinator (LOSC) to participate in unified command (UC).**
 - ◆ While the paramount authority for decision-making remains with the federal on-scene coordinator (FOSC) and state incident commander (SIC) in UC, without the MOU, the County may not be represented on UC, which would remove the County having a direct role in the decision-making process.
 - ◆ The County preserved emergency permitting authority in the MOU through a provision that specifies that the decisions of UC do not preempt the County or impacted jurisdictions from “enforcing applicable ordinances, permit conditions, or other provisions of law such that they do not conflict with orders issued by the FOSC or SIC during the response.”
 - ◆ Preservation of this authority has been critical to the County’s efforts to ensure comprehensive cleanup of impacted beaches and involvement from the responsible party (RP) as response operations have transitioned into the final phase.

Primary Strengths

- ◆ **County Public Health Department personnel and contract support to Planning and Development were both operational on the impacted beaches.**
 - ◆ Direct support was provided from the Public Health Department related to health and safety monitoring at the incident site, and department staff were included on several UC environmental unit workgroups and on field teams.
 - ◆ This internal capability provided the County visibility into field operations and demonstrates a strength in internal capability among County staff.
- ◆ **The County Oil Response Group (COR) functioned as a multi-agency coordination (MAC) group, supporting decision-making and collaboration with the LOSC as the operation transitioned from immediate response into long-term response and recovery operations.**
 - ◆ While the COR was not immediately established following the incident, when it was established the COR increased visibility into the operations of UC and supported an efficient decision-making structure for the County.

Primary Areas for Improvement

- ◆ While implementation of the COR is considered a primary strength for the County, the top area for improvement remains internal coordination to support decision-making and coordination with the LOSC in UC.
 - ◆ Prior to establishing the COR, direct support and coordination with the LOSC was primarily ad-hoc.
 - ◆ Meetings were held with the Recovery Advisory Council and Disaster Council, which included elected officials from the County; the COR, however, did not include representation from elected officials.
 - ◆ While the LOSC operated effectively in UC as it applies to initial response decision-making, the absence of an operational structure to support long-term decision-making resulted in decisions begin made in UC without consensus from County stakeholders.

Primary Areas for Improvement

- ◆ **While a joint information center (JIC) was established to support UC at the ICP, a separate JIC specific to the County was not established.**
 - ◆ The lack of a separate County JIC, or clear protocols on what information needed to be approved by UC, resulted in delayed public messaging regarding general incident information, and in some cases, delayed messaging about specific critical issues, like public health notifications.
 - ◆ The County expressed dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of public information and overall management of the JIC to UC. In an attempt to address these concerns, the County established various systems to ensure key stakeholders were provided information.
 - ◆ The operation experienced issues associated with press conferences, including the lack of an established schedule for press conferences and prevention of participation from local and County officials in those press conferences. Local press and the general public were also denied access to some press conferences.

Primary Areas for Improvement

- ◆ **The County was not involved in staffing positions in the incident command post (ICP), an area for improvement that could enhance internal County coordination and operations.**
 - ◆ While the LOOSC serves a role in establishing incident objectives and crafting the incident action plan (IAP) through UC, strategic guidance and implementation of the IAP falls to the ICP.
 - ◆ Local and County partners were not offered a significant opportunity to provide staff to the ICP by UC, creating an additional disconnect between operations through UC and the County, particularly when the ICP was relocated from the County emergency operations center (EOC).

Synergy with State and Federal After-Action Reports

- ◆ **Improvement in engagement of local government and non-governmental partners (NGO) partners.**
 - ◆ Recommendations include leveraging resources offered through local partners, formalizing structures to engage NGOs, and increasing planning inclusiveness as it applies to cultural resources representatives.
- ◆ **Clarifying the role of and responsibilities of the LOSC.**
 - ◆ Clarity on the decision-making process utilized by UC and the respective authority of each representative, including the LOSC, would improve the overall operation of UC.
- ◆ **Enhancing public engagement, including use of volunteers.**
 - ◆ Recommendations include improving volunteer management through planning, including a focus on non-wildlife volunteers, spontaneous volunteers, and trained volunteers.
- ◆ **Improvement in operations of the JIC.**
 - ◆ Staff identified to support the JIC should have greater continuity to enhance coordination of operations.

Global Observations

Common Issues with Previous Oil Spill Response Operations

Cosco Buscan (2007) and Deepwater Horizon (2010)

- ◆ Issues identified in the 2015 Refugio Oil Spill are common and are reflected in the findings associated with previous events in the State and on a national basis.
 - ◆ Common issues include those associated with information sharing with the public, establishing a unified message between the partners in UC, managing volunteers, incorporating local stakeholders, and support to local stakeholders as it applies to scientific and environmental issues.
- ◆ Lessons learned and resources can be shared across the United States, particularly as it applies to coordination with local governments who also have jurisdiction and responsibility when there is an oil spill.

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