

Biannual RRT Meeting September 21-22 Salt Lake City, Utah

The biannual meeting of the Regional Response Team was held September 21 – 22 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Cpt. Edward Cubanski, USCG, whose organization assisted with the Yellowstone River oil spill, thanked Ty Bailey, Utah Division of Emergency Management, for hosting the meeting. David Ostrander commented that it had been a very busy summer for EPA's Emergency Response Unit which was tasked with two major incidents, the Yellowstone River oil spill and the North Dakota floods.

The Region 8 RRT provided updates on major activities on both state and federal levels. Other federal agencies representatives included DOI, FEMA OSHA, DOE NOAA and DOD.

North Dakota Flooding: Ray DeBoer, North Dakota Emergency Services, spoke on the North Dakota flooding. He reported that 17,000 to 18,000 were evacuated in Minot, 4,000 people went to shelters and at least 500 were still staying in temporary housing. This all occurred while a North Dakota oil boom was also filling all available rooms in that area. FEMA continues to deliver about 25 trailers every two to three days which are being winterized, while 6 Minot hotels continue to shelter people.

A surge in oil interest in the State is resulting in increased oil spills, already two in Lake Sakakawea in the Missouri River basin and recently two oil workers were killed in an oil rig explosion in the western part of the State.

OSHA representative William Wright talked about their involvement in the recent North Dakota flooding and that his organization had made more than 200 interventions with contractors out of compliance. He said the agency was involved with establishing the mancamp for 400 emergency responders working response during the flood.

Wright also mentioned how OSHA enforcement was working with the North Dakota gas and oil industry, which is undergoing a boom, to improve occupational safety practices there and also with the grain industry to increase elevator safety awareness. Both industries, Wright said, have experienced several fatalities in the last year.

South Dakota Flooding: Kim McIntosh, South Dakota Environmental Resources, said her state's problems were dwarfed in comparison to North Dakota, but that the James River and the Big Sioux have been out of their banks since last winter. There are several dams along the Missouri River and so people built homes along the river, some very expensive. In Pierre the agency had five shelters in use and had no alternative housing.

Utah: Mike Riley, Utah Department of Public Safety, talked about the upcoming **ShakeOut** which is scheduled April 17, 2012. More than 350,000 have already signed up to participate in the "Drop, Cover and Hold On" earthquake readiness event.

Ty Bailey, Division of Emergency Management, mentioned that his organization was working to develop emergency plans for the State's first nuclear power plant near Green River, Utah. In October an evacuation time study is planned.

NOAA: Lt. John Lomnicky, NOAA, spoke on his agency's involvement in the Joplin Tornado disaster and also NOAA's work with river geologists to map model flows. He said that the Yellowstone River oil spill assumptions followed model predictions.

FEMA has responded to more than 100 disasters nationwide this year, reported Mary Beth Vasco, Technical Hazards Specialist, FEMA Region 8. She also mentioned that grant assistance for area fire departments was available for hazmat use, although applications were due that week.

EPA: Luke Chavez, EPA Exercise Coordinator, said the Agency has participated in 36 emergency drills to date and that 10 more are on the schedule. He also talked about the oil boom occurring in the six-state region and how thousands of pending applications for drilling permits portends the potential for an increase number of oil spills.

Chavez spoke about a fracking study EPA is conducting in Paivllion, Wyoming that is investigating the procedure's potential to contaminate groundwater. Chemicals used in fracking were found in some domestic wells there, though proof is lacking to positively link the contamination to the drilling technique. EPA sampled 21 domestic water wells and the results were brought to the ATSDR which recommended people not drink the water. Wyoming is the first to require that the drilling companies state what chemicals they are using in fracking, followed by Texas.

Fukushima Daiichi: Steve Morreale, Regional Response Coordinator, DOE, National Nuclear Security Administration, talked about DOE's response to radiological releases from the recent nuclear power plant failure in Japan following the March 11th earthquake and tsunami. Morreale said his agency provided the first aerial measurement activities over the plant along with detailed sampling, in support of the U.S. Embassy there and to U.S. forces stationed in Japan. His comments were that private industry is poorly prepared for such a disaster.

David Everett, also with DOE, explained in detail how the disaster occurred even as the nuclear power plant was in shut down mode. His agencies response was to assess environmental conditions. Under direction of the Whitehouse, he flew out of Las Vegas to set up operations at Japan's Yakota Air Force Base and began aerial measuring system activities using fixed wing and helicopter surveillance to follow the plume's path, and participated in 85 flights, clocking more than 500 hours in the air. Mobile monitoring and ground crews covered 42,000 miles of highway, providing 590 air samples and 110 in-situ samples.

One of the major foci following the disaster was how to get the Tokyo Express Rail Line back up and running. In dealing with such disasters, winning the public trust is the key, Everett said. The truth will always come out on top. A single voice with a single message is imperative.

DOD/DOE: Richard Graham, EPA Preparedness Unit, and Craig Myers, EPA On-Scene Coordinator, discussed the differences between DOD and DOE led responses including the differences in authorities used, and NCP versus the National Response Framework.

Graham noted that radiological events heightened those differences in response. A discussion was held on the types of radiological emergencies that could occur and who would handle each. Graham prepared a chart with specific examples and walked the group through which agency had the authority to respond and at what level.

A group discussion followed on efforts to get the public sector back up and running following a disaster. How clean is clean, participants asked, and how do we do cleanup quickly to return to business as usual?

Rail Safety: Bradley Miller, EPA Preparedness Unit, spoke on Hazmat Safety on Railroad Sidings. Miller gave an example of a how even though there are laws regulating the transport of hazardous materials from the manufacturer to the final destination, rail cars containing hazardous materials are also often also used for storage. Railcars become a fixed facility once the motive force is disconnected Miller said, which requires the preparation of a risk management plan coordinated with the LEPC. He gave an example in Mitchell, S.D., where railcars containing flammable materials were left in storage in town. The local fire department, out of safety concerns, tried to obtain more information on the railcars but were ignored by the rail company until a court order was issued.

The LEPC can require that facilities provide them with periodic reporting and for the facility to have a written response plan. My concern, Bradley said, is that the Local Emergency Planning Committee know that the railcars are there and know what to do if there is a problem.

North Dakota is developing three 110 car railcar loading stations for crude delivery. Miller said a Facility Response Plan is required if more than one million gallons of oil are involved. He pointed out that it takes 29 cars holding 34,500 gallons each to reach the million gallon threshold.

Wednesday's RRT Session 9/21/2011...

Wednesday's RRT had a change in focus from the standard format. Instead of a review of site work, the focus was on two of the major disasters that occupied the majority of Regional resources and the attention of the nation—the North Dakota Floods and the Silvertip Pipeline oil spill response on the Yellowstone River.

North Dakota Floods: Kerry Guy, On-Scene Coordinator for Region 8 EPA, gave a video presentation of work in Minot on the North Dakota Floods. Guy was one of several Region 8 OSCs that rotated through assignments in Minot. FEMA issued Region 8 EPA with a mission assignment in May or early June tasking it with ESF 10 duties including the removal of household hazardous waste, decontamination and preparation of white goods and e-wastes for recycling, collection and processing of orphan containers and environmental monitoring and sampling of impacted areas

A few weeks after the initial recon began on July 11, it was determined that vermiculite insulation, the majority of which was produced by W.R. Grace, was present in some of the older homes and, consequently, this asbestos bearing material began appearing on the curbsides as home owners returned to gut their houses. "We strongly discouraged residents against cleaning up their own asbestos, but then again every contractor in North Dakota was booked for the foreseeable future," Kerry said.

The final neighborhood HHW sweeps were wrapping up within the next few weeks. Nearly 110,000 containers - some propane tanks, others filled with diesel or household chemicals - were processed over the duration. Demobilization efforts will soon be underway.

One of the success drivers of EPA's intervention was a data management tool that allowed workers on the ground to upload photos and data while working in the field.

When the Souris River overtopped its banks on June 11, more than 4,000 homes were damaged, and some 2,000 homes completely inundated.

Pamphlets were distributed giving residents a debris removal guide and how to sort waste on their curbsides for removal.

Of the 110,000 containers collected, some 11,000 were orphaned containers ranging from 5 gallon containers of gasoline to 5,000 gallon propane tanks. Everything was brought to the Processing Pad area for sorting. When possible, orphan containers were returned to their owners. Some 2,000 containers containing unknown substances and their contents had to be resolved by chemists.

EPA did not go into homes, but collected what people put out on the curbsides. EPA personnel dressed in appropriate PPE, although much of the rest of the population did not have this protection.

The County required that residents in the affected flood area tear out walls and ceilings to eliminate mold, but if baseboards were wet from flooding, the mold often began to crawl up the walls. The local Health Department put out information on how to clean residential homes, but most did not have the money to hire professionals and so did it themselves. Many home owners ended up gutting their own homes; perhaps 95% of home owners did not have flood insurance. The last flood of this comparison was in 1969 and this current flood was 10 feet higher than the 1969 event.

Kerry lauded the efforts of several volunteer groups that came to help. He said that these groups were even more conscientious about wearing appropriate respirators and safety protective equipment than some contractors, and that these groups performed countless hours of community service to North Dakota flood victims

Yellowstone River Oil Spill: Craig Myers, OSC, said the pipeline broke during the rivers crest. At the Yellowstone's peak, waves on the river were three feet tall and water was running at 60,000 cfs, roughly 10 times its normal flow.

The oil spill call was received through the National Response Center at 2 a.m. on July 2nd. Due to the holiday weekend flights were all booked and responding OSCs had to drive.

The 12-inch pipeline was installed in 1991 roughly 8 to 10 feet beneath the river's base, but at the time of the event was exposed and broken, with the severed ends lying at a downriver angle. It was estimated that 1,000 barrels of oil, or 42,000 gallons, were lost before ExxonMobil's pipeline was shut off by low-pressure SCADA alarms.

Myers described some of the problems faced in cleanup activities including a constant battle to stop contractors from doing physical damage, cleaning oiled birds and other wildlife, property owners that denied access and the time it took to get sample air and water results.

Some of the lessons learned in this incident included:

- people on the scene need to be the ones making the decisions
- personnel turnover taxes continuity
- it is important to have state ownership