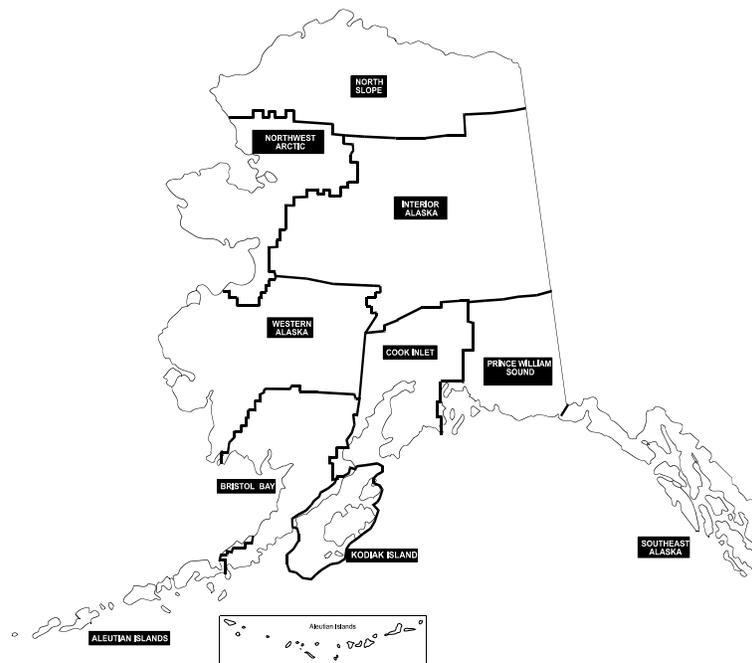


ALASKA UNIFIED PLAN



Overview

The large, environmentally sensitive geographic area covered by the Alaska Unified Plan creates a unique challenge for emergency responders. The native population, wildlife, and numerous industries rely on a healthy ecosystem to survive. With small clusters of communities scattered across a huge landmass, responders are hard pressed to guarantee that adequate response resources will be available to remote locations in a crisis. The Alaska Unified Plan endeavors to ensure that resources will be available. Building on Area Committee and Local Emergency Preparedness Committee (LEPC) concepts, the plan is organized around 10 subarea committees, which work together with LEPCs to reach this goal. This plan contains various unique and successful features, such as:

- Active recruitment of remote LEPCs;
- Use of joint federal / state “subarea” contingency plans; and
- A tiered approach to integrating response requirements and resources.

Background

The Alaska Federal / State Preparedness Plan for Response to Oil & Hazardous Substance Discharges / Releases (Alaska Unified Plan) allows a coordinated response to discharges or releases anywhere within the boundaries of Alaska and its surrounding waters, including the Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands, and the Arctic Ocean. Land areas in Alaska include the 800-mile Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the largest oil fields in America, and the vast National Petroleum Reserve. Fishing, logging, coal and gold mining, as well as petroleum and oil transport, are some of the major industries in Alaska. In addition, the Great Circle Route, one of the main trading routes of the Pacific Rim nations, intersects the Alaska Unified Plan’s boundaries near the Aleutian Islands. Alaska is an extremely sensitive region due to the unique nature of its population, wildlife, industries, and geography.

Coordinated Planning Activities

The goal of this unified planning effort is to integrate and streamline the planning, preparedness, and response efforts of federal, state, and local agencies, LEPCs, and industry. Planning and response occurs at four levels:

- (1) Unified Plan;
- (2) Subarea Plans;
- (3) Local Emergency Plans; and
- (4) facility / vessel (responsible party) plans.

(1) The Unified Plan combines federal planning requirements under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) with state requirements for oil and hazardous substance contingency planning. The Alaska Unified Plan contains federal, state, and local policy guidelines regarding the organizational structure, Incident Command System (ICS), response, funding, and wildlife protection. General guidance for health, safety, training, public media information, and leadership for the subareas and local response organizations is also included.

(2) Due to Alaska's size and limited response resources, the State is divided into ten subareas to provide better local planning. The Alaska Unified Plan is supported by these ten joint federal / state subarea contingency plans, which provide region-specific information with regard to response capabilities. Each of these subarea plans focuses on specific areas of concern, including scenarios for worst-case, maximum, and average oil discharges and hazardous substance releases. Additionally, each subarea plan contains environmental sensitivity data, and provides local descriptions, response systems, assessments, and potential resources for response. Each subarea is unique, but maintains continuity with the Alaska Unified Plan through checklists and baseline guidance.

(3) LEPCs identify all at-risk facilities, response routes, coordinators, evacuation plans, and determine the affected areas. In addition, they provide emergency response and notification procedures. Within the State of Alaska, LEPCs have been directed to prepare all-disaster plans, including response to hazardous substance incidents (per SARA Title III and State statutes).

(4) The facility / vessel plans written by the regulated industrial community contain communications protocols, reporting requirements, safety guidelines, and deployment / response strategies. Each facility / vessel plan also contains prevention plans with supplemental information, such as logistical support, equipment, command systems, and sensitive areas protection guidelines.

In the event of a major discharge or release, the responsible facility / vessel response plan will be activated along with the local community's emergency response plan, the applicable subarea plan, and the Alaska Unified Plan. This tiered approach integrates requirements and resources, and provides continuity, organization and cooperation in response. (See Figure 1).

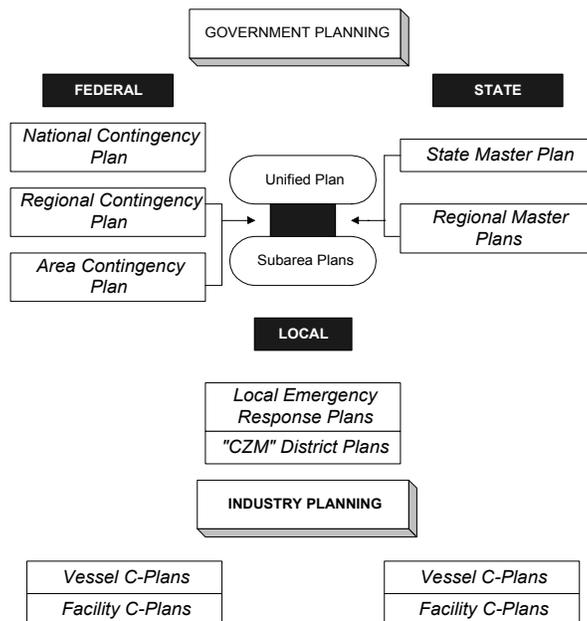


Figure 1.

As a cooperative effort, much of the Alaska Unified Plan’s direction comes from the Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT). The plan is reviewed annually. The ARRT’s main challenges are the organization of an effective response in a state the size of Alaska; the creation of subareas that fall under the jurisdiction of both the State and federal government; and education for remote communities. Because involvement at every level is key, the ARRT attempts to keep federal, State, and local members abreast of current activities through meetings, conventional means (i.e. telephone or fax), and teleconferencing. The cooperative effort between parties is a key factor in the success of the Alaska Unified Plan.



Planning Committee Activities

- Monthly meeting of the Unified Planning Committee
- Annual plan updates
- Integrates subarea plans into the Unified Plan
- Recruiting remote LEPCs.

Integrating Subarea Plans. The ARRT continually attempts to create and integrate subarea plans into the unified planning effort. In a geographic area as large as Alaska, creating more subarea plans identifies more response resources, and provides improved local planning.

Recruiting Remote LEPCs. Each Subarea Committee (SAC) actively recruits voluntary participation from LEPCs, and assists local communities with plan formulation. Local Response Agreements (LRAs) are also negotiated between the State of Alaska and local communities. Should an incident occur, the State of Alaska may ask the community to respond on the State's behalf with full reimbursement. For example, a hazardous materials (HAZMAT) response team in Fairbanks may respond to an incident in the Aleutian Islands, and will receive full reimbursement from the State. This serves to expand resources available for response, reduce response times, and give the community discretion and reimbursement for assistance.

Partnership. The Alaska Unified Plan relies on partnership and cooperation. It attempts to break down barriers by streamlining response capabilities and creating partnerships between all levels. The federal and State levels have numerous “Memoranda of Understanding” which detail the responsibilities and agreements of the response organizations. The local level responders are essential partners because of their specialized training, focus on public safety, local knowledge, and willingness to help in other areas of the State, as well as acting on behalf of the State.

Training & Exercises

Preparedness Exercises. In addition to the required Preparedness for Response Exercise Program (PREP) exercises, the industry and government participants conduct three major drills annually at the North Slope, Valdez, and Cook Inlet oil production facilities.

Training. ICS training is provided by the U.S. Coast Guard and others to the subarea and local area responders. Various State agencies, including the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Environmental Conservation, provide training from their response perspective.

Incident Analysis

Incident. On November 26, 1997 (Thanksgiving Eve), the M/V Kuroshima, a 368-foot freight ship went aground near Dutch Harbor while attempting to move to safer anchorage in extremely heavy weather. Two crewmen were fatally injured, and an estimated 47,000 gallons of heavy fuel oil was released into Summer Bay and Summer Lake. For complete details on the incident, visit the Unified Command web site at: www.state.ak.us/dec/home.htm

Response. The initial rescue of the vessel’s crew was coordinated by the Coast Guard with assistance from local emergency response crews. The City of Unalaska’s local emergency staff, local native corporations, private companies, and individuals were well-prepared and provided excellent support during the emergency and recovery phase.

M/V Kuroshima Incident Positive Comments

- Unified Command concept worked well
- Commendable public affairs effort
- Local community outreach meetings and the Internet web site key to keeping everyone informed
- Outstanding support from the local community critical to successful response.

The Coast Guard, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), and other agencies established the Unified Command in Unalaska on Thanksgiving Day and set the initial objective of stabilizing the grounded vessel by securing cables to the shore. The severe weather in the area, with snow and heavy winds in the 40 to 50-knot range, provided significant challenges to the overall response effort. The U.S. Coast Guard accessed the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund and also mobilized the Pacific Strike Team to augment response operations. The State of Alaska likewise activated its Oil and Hazardous Substance Release Prevention and Response Fund, deployed response staff to the scene, and contracted with private vendors for specific services. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game were heavily involved in the capture and collection of live and deceased oiled wildlife in the area.

The Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Team (SCAT) was tasked with determining the extent of oiling along the beaches of Summer Bay, Humpy Cove, Morris Cove, and Summer Lake. Cleanup crews were then tasked with the removal of oil on the shoreline and oiled debris. Some of the oiled debris was burned on the beach, and oiled sand was processed at a permitted facility at an Army Corp of Engineer's site in Dutch Harbor. The processed sand was returned to the beach. The fuel oil remaining on board the damaged ship was pumped to onshore storage tanks. Cleanup of the oil-impacted areas is anticipated to continue through the Spring and Summer of 1998.

The grounded vessel was refloated in Summer Bay using a combination of dredging, pulling with its deck gear and propulsion, shore-based equipment, and tug assistance. It was towed to the marine dock in Dutch Harbor on March 1, 1998.

Lessons Learned. Suggestions for improving future responses of this nature include: providing additional trained staff for the Unified Incident Command System; continued review and enhancements of remote area spill response capabilities to include pre-identification of command post locations, staging areas, joint communications, waste management sites, and local community response capabilities; further training for the Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Team regarding its role, ICS organizational alignment, and general guidelines; quicker integration of the ICS Logistics Section to eliminate delays in resource ordering; and the establishment of a functional staging area to provide effective equipment tracking.

Points of Contact



Carl Lautenberger
Phone: (907) 271-4306
U.S. EPA Region 10,
Alaska Operations Office

LCDR Larry Musarra
Phone: (907) 463-2211
U.S. Coast Guard District Seventeen,
Maritime Planning Division

Larry Iwamoto
Phone: (907) 269-7683
Alaska Department of Environmental
Conservation