



THE NATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM

Working together to protect from threats to our land, air, and water.

National Response Team (MS 5401)

U.S. EPA
Washington, DC
20460

June 25, 2018

Chair:
Environmental
Protection Agency

Vice Chair:
U.S. Coast Guard

Department of
Commerce

Department of the
Interior

Department of
Agriculture

Department of
Defense

Department of
State

Department of
Justice

Department of
Transportation

Department of Health
and Human Services

Federal Emergency
Management Agency

Department of
Energy

Department of
Labor

Nuclear Regulatory
Commission

General Services
Administration

To: **Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Coast Guard Regional Response Team Co-Chairs**

From: **National Response Team Chair and Vice Chair**

Re: **Recent National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and U.S. Coast Guard Cohort Studies**

The U.S. National Response Team (NRT) is responsible for coordinating emergency preparedness and response to oil and hazardous substance pollution incidents, as implemented through the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan. Among other duties, the NRT provides policy, program direction and guidance to the Regional Response Teams (RRTs) on preparedness planning and response in furtherance of a coordinated national response program.

The NRT has always encouraged scientific study to inform improvements in our operations and in the protection of the public and our responders. Several studies recently published in the scientific literature have highlighted the importance of ensuring responder safety during oil spill responses. Two among these are the *Gulf Long-term Follow-up Study (GuLF STUDY)* conducted by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and the *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Cohort study* conducted by the Uniformed Services University, USCG, and other federal and academic institutions. These studies have the potential to advance our understanding of the environmental and human health impacts of oil spills, resulting in improved planning and preparedness for future responses.

Worker health and safety is the highest priority during response operations as evidenced by the protective measures that are routinely implemented. Findings from these and other studies can help further inform existing policies and provide guidance for future responses. These studies will assist in providing insight to assist contingency planners and response professionals in implementing health and safety protocols. The NRT intends to further engage with the sponsors of these studies to discuss their research and to better understand their conclusions. Science, by its nature, is an ongoing process. It is through continued research, and through assessment of our practices and procedures that improvements to worker health and safety protection capabilities will be achieved, particularly for Spills of National Significance.

Additionally, the findings of both the NIEHS and USCG Cohort studies were presented to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) *Committee on the Evaluation of the Use of Chemical Dispersants in Oil Spill Response* as part of their ongoing effort. The NRT will consider NASEM's findings in the context of spill response as appropriate, and determine the need to provide more specific guidance to the RRTs.

In the interim, the NRT expects that worker health and safety protocols continue to be implemented that offer the maximum levels of protection, and remains committed to advising the RRTs prior to and during a response. The NRT will continue to monitor future developments on these studies and to convey relevant information to the RRTs for their awareness.

Sincerely,



Reggie Cheatham, Chair
National Response Team



Captain Ricardo Alonso, Vice Chair
National Response Team