

Creating a Universal NOAA Oil Spill Response Plan: The challenges in forming a functional response plan along all line offices operating NOAA small boats

Alfrë S. Wimberley
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Environmental Science Major
Chemistry Minor
Healthy Oceans
NOAA Small Boat Program

Mentor: Darel McCormick, Vessel Inspections Coordinator
Co-Mentor: LCDR Nicola VerPlanck, NOAA

Objectives

- To develop a Ship Oil Pollution Emergency Plan (SOPEP)
- To ensure the functional worth of the plan across all line offices
- Create the backbone of a dynamic plan that can be relevant to every large vessel in the NOAA small boat fleet.



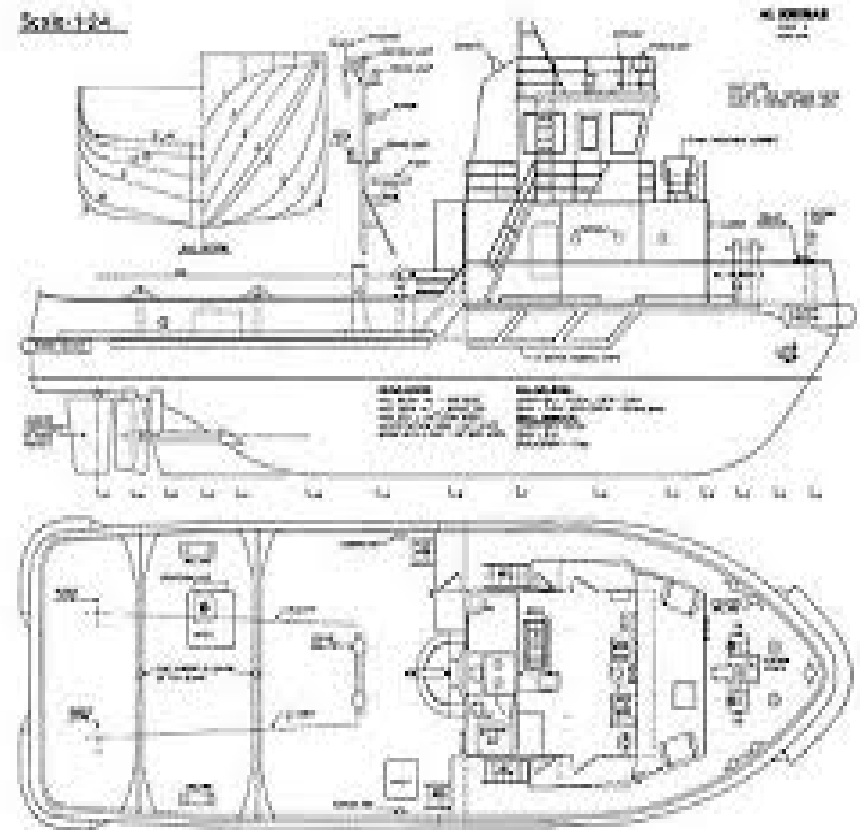
What Prompted the need for a SOPEP?

- “R/V Laidly” fire in 2012
- Formal plan not in place
- Financial crisis developed dealing with the hazardous waste left behind



What's in a "SOPEP"?

- Vessel specs for all types of oils, water, and sewage on-board
- Emergency contacts and notification agencies
- Initial Report forms for state and national agencies.
- Sensitive areas (Sanctuaries, breeding grounds, etc.)
- Most importantly, contacts for funds



Response Tier

1st Tier

- Contractor (OSROs (Oil Spill Response Organization))

2nd Tier

- Finance and Acquisitions

3rd Tier

- NOAA Emergency Response (PR & Management)
- Miscellaneous specific to the vessel

Notification Tier

1st Tier

- National Response Center (NRC)
- Coast Guard RCC (Rescue Coordination Center)
- VOC (Vessel Operations Coordinator)

2nd Tier

- State Organizations/Sanctuaries
- NOAA Affiliated Response (OR&R, etc.)

3rd Tier

- Harbormasters/ Env. Managers of the Port
- Local Concerned Parties

- Each Vessel has specific notification trees based on location, state authorities, and federal law***



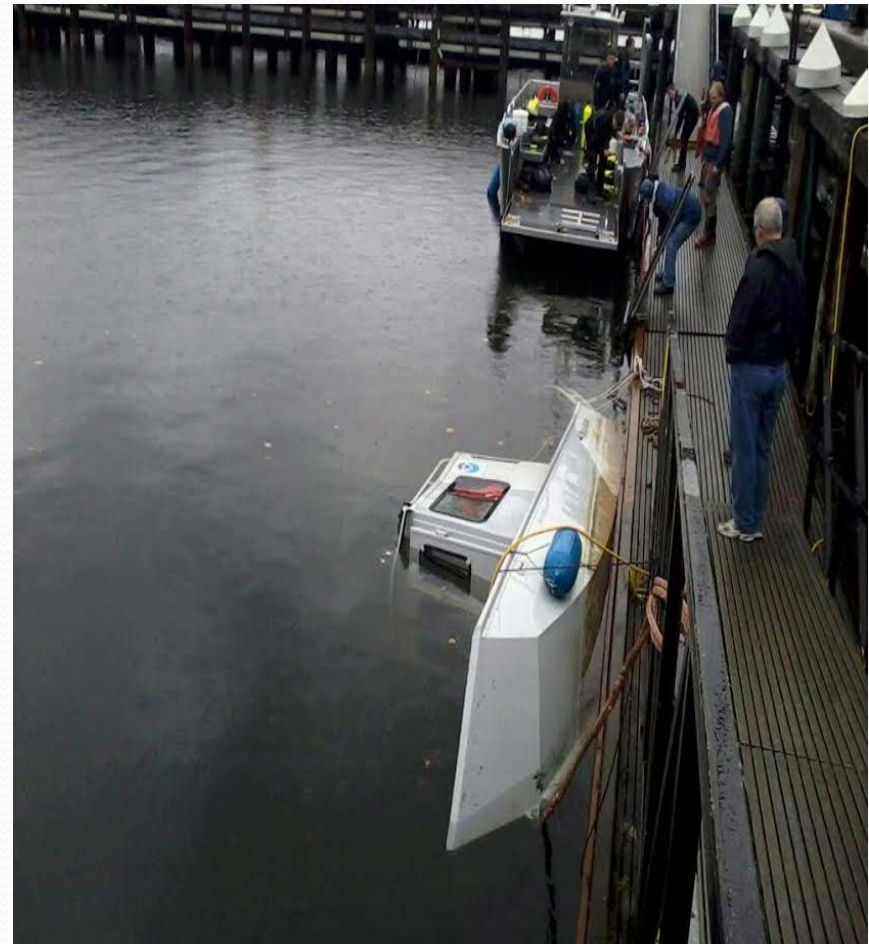
How to you build a “SOPEP”?

- The project was started with a large commercial ship SOPEP and made more appropriate for small vessels
- A SOPEP contains a robust list of people and organizations
- The structural foundation is the same and the contacts are customized for each vessel
- Identify aid contacts versus notification in an emergency



People/Organizations Involved

- United States Coast Guard (USCG)
 - NRC and RCC
- Relevant State Authorities
- National Marine Sanctuaries
- Financial Acquisitions Office
- Response Contractors (OSROs)
- Homeport or docking port resources
 - Harbormasters
 - Environmental Managers
- Vessel Operations Coordinators (VOCs)
- NOAA Affiliated Response
 - Emergency Response (OR & R)
 - Marine Debris, etc.
- Others that are vessel specific



Major Obstacles

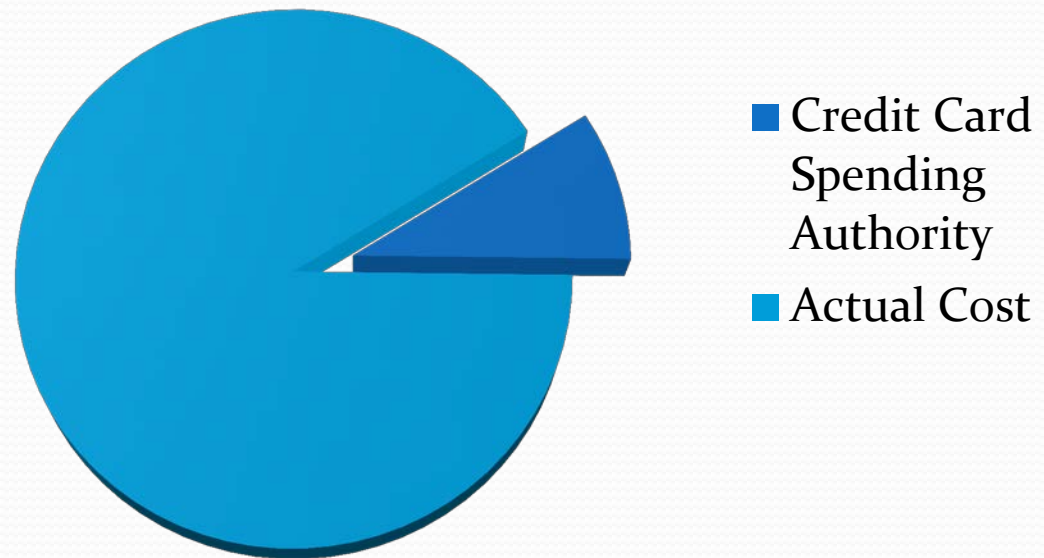
- Obligating funds is the hardest problem to overcome
- Identifying an emergency financial response
 - The structure is in place, but not necessarily at the rate an environmental emergency requires
- Rotating personnel or vacancies within the NOAA response structure can cause confusion or delays.



Emergency Finances

- Each vessel is given \$3500.00 credit card spending authority
- This usually covers the contractor arriving and nothing else
- The average small boat spill cost 35K (not considering after hours considerations in cost!)
- Credit card authorization process

Immediate Spending Percentage



See the problem?

In the field vs. In the office

- Non-standard terminology between line offices and field personnel
- A SOPEP provides a common language to limit confusion in reporting a spill, who to contact, and what responsibility each position holds



What can be done to improve the process?

- Streamline the financials
- Develop contracts and memos to verify funds immediately (no matter the hour and circumvent the traditional structure for the initial response)
- Existing financial avenues may be too slow for a spill to be effective in the clean-up process



How do we go fleet-wide?

- A template of the plan with instructions will be sent out to larger vessels in the small boat fleet
- The specifics of each plan will be filled out by Vessel Operations Coordinators (VOC) and associated personnel.
- Each blank SOPEP comes with instructions on how to build a customized response plan, maintain the plan, and account for exceptional individual circumstances.

Were you successful?

- A standardized template for a SOPEP was created for all vessels to develop their own plan.
- Completed SOPEPs were delivered to R/V MANTA and R/V TATOOSH.
- A disparity with obligating finances within a critical time period was identified but not completely resolved.
- Financials must be individually determined with each line office.



How this was accomplished

- Spent hours and travel talking to individuals in NOAA about their perspectives and needs
- Worked with field personnel through senior leadership
- Solicited opinions, effectively used given suggestions, and mirrored successful SOPEPs for the larger vessels.



Thank You!

- This project would not be possible without my mentor, co-mentor, the Hollings Program, and associated Small Boat Program!

