



Nearshore Operations Response Strategy (NORS)

INTRODUCTION

The Nearshore Operations Response Strategy (NORS) concept was developed to define a spill response system capable of operating in Alaska's nearshore waters, especially in remote regions with limited infrastructure. A NORS work group, led by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), met several times during 2011-2013 to develop the NORS strategy. The goal of the NORS strategy is to protect the Alaska coastline from a large oil spill by identifying the resources and response infrastructure needed to implement nearshore protection tactics. Timely and effective nearshore response is critical to protecting the sensitive areas and areas of public concern within the State.

A response to a large marine spill can be considered in three phases. The first phase of the response is to contain and remove the oil at the scene of the spill or while it is still on the open water, thereby reducing or eliminating impact on shorelines or sensitive habitats. If some of the spilled oil escapes this phase, the second phase, which is no less important, is to intercept, contain and remove the oil in the nearshore area. The intent of phase two is the same as phase one: remove the spilled oil before it impacts sensitive environments. If phases one and two are not fully successful, phase three seeks to protect sensitive areas in the path of the oil. The purpose of phase three is to protect the selected sensitive areas from the impacts of a spill or to minimize that impact to the maximum extent practical.

NORS is designed to provide a response capability to implement phases two and three – nearshore recovery and sensitive area protection, for the purpose of protecting sensitive areas, cultural resources, and areas of public concern. Nearshore recovery operations (described by NORS tactics) are necessary to recover oil that has escaped the on-scene recovery operations, and will become the primary means of recovery as the oil spreads into a thinner sheen and breaks up into isolated patches over the first few days of an oil spill. Sensitive area protection focuses on deployment of resources to protect environmentally sensitive areas ahead of the oil trajectory. In some cases, a Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) may provide a plan to protect a specific sensitive area. In other cases, the protection strategy may have to be developed on-scene.

The circumstances of each oil spill are unique, depending on the volume and type of product spilled, location of the spill, season, wildlife present, and many more factors. The appropriate response



to a spill is also unique. Because mounting an effective nearshore response in the remote regions of Alaska is a daunting task, the NORS seeks to support planning and implementation of a remote, nearshore response by providing guidance and examples.

These strategies and tactics are intended to be flexible and may be modified by spill responders to fit prevailing conditions at the time of a spill. The extent to which typical protected water conditions prevail will vary around the state. Seasonal constraints, such as ice or weather, may preclude implementation of some of the strategies in the winter months. Only those components that are needed will be implemented; it is not intended that all components be automatically implemented at the beginning of a spill. Spill responders should focus on minimizing environmental damage, utilizing as small a footprint as needed to support the response operations, and operating in a manner that will not cause more damage than the spilled oil.

NORS was created as a stand-alone section of the STAR Manual and is comprised of the following tactics:

- Nearshore Operations Planning and Implementation tactic provides information for planners and responders to implement a Nearshore Response Group (NRG).
- Nearshore Group Logistics Base tactic describes the logistical support requirements for a NRG utilizing marine vessels for staging personnel and resources. This tactic focuses on the requirement to support operations in remote areas of Alaska without resupply for up to 21 days.

Many response tactics in other sections of the STAR Manual might be implemented by a Nearshore Operations Group. These tactics include but are not limited to:

- Nearshore Free-oil Recovery
- Aerial Observation supporting Nearshore Operations
- Exclusion Boom
- Deflection Boom
- Marine Recovery
- Shoreside Recovery
- Passive Recovery
- Marine-based Storage and Transfer of Oily Liquids
- Staging Area
- Vessel Decontamination

