



The Service at Coastal Oil Spills

Part of the Department of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the federal agency responsible for many of the nation's fish and wildlife resources. Having this responsibility has established the Service as one of the trustees for fish, wildlife, and habitat at oil spills.

Swinging Into Action

The U.S. Coast Guard coordinates response activities at coastal oil spills. When the Coast Guard is notified of a spill, it contacts the appropriate local, state, health, and emergency officials, and the Department of the Interior about the location and extent of the spill. The Department of the Interior then notifies the appropriate U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff who look at the spill size and its effects on resources and decide if and how the Service will respond.

When Service biologists arrive at a spill, they report to the Coast Guard's Incident Command Post. They join staff from the state resource agencies and the National Oceanic Atmospheric

Administration and begin assessing the damage to fish, wildlife, and habitat and assisting with preventing additional harm.

Behind the Scenes

Actually, Service biologists work year round to prepare for oil spills. For example, biologists meet with staff from other agencies and organizations involved in spills to fine tune response procedures to ensure that activities at the next spill will be well coordinated.

Also, biologists from the Service and state resource agencies locate and survey fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resources vulnerable to a coastal oil spill. This natural resource inventory becomes part of the Coast Guard's Area Contingency Plans so that if a spill occurs, the response agencies know the area's natural resources that should be protected.

Activities At the Spill

Many Service biologists may be involved in a significant oil spill. Some will help state biologists set up a wildlife rehabilitation center and assist with recovering oiled migratory birds.

Other biologists will begin surveying the spill's effects on wildlife habitat and advise the Coast Guard on measures to protect other natural resources from oil contamination.

Service law enforcement staff team up with other response agency law enforcement staff to investigate potential

criminal acts and assist with crowd control.

Still other personnel help keep the media and public informed about the spill's effects on fish and wildlife.

The Work Continues

Another important aspect of the Service's work begins after the spill is under control. Service biologists then begin assessing the full extent of the spill, determining what natural resources were exposed and what harm the oil caused to those natural resources. This process involves sampling and surveying and can take many months.

Biologists will use the information to work with those responsible for the spill and other natural resource trustees to seek compensation for natural resources injured by the spill.

For more information, contact:

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