

BEST RESPONSE: MEASURING SUCCESS

Captain Joseph T. Kuchin
U.S. Coast Guard
Chief, Marine Safety Division
Coast Guard Atlantic Area, Portsmouth, VA

Abstract

The success of a response is frequently measured in a variety of ways including initial reaction, public perception, physical and/or monetary damage to the environment, amount spent on the response, effectiveness of restoration efforts and other, often conflicting or contradictory measures. A recent review of responses since the EXXON VALDEZ reflected many positive organizational and technological advances as well as other areas with unsolved problems. Despite these innovations the authors have found no comprehensive system, agreed upon by the response community, that systematically evaluates the success of the response effort.

This paper proposes a model for response evaluation that highlights six key areas that must be addressed to adequately define success before, during and after a response. The areas are: 1) human health and safety; 2) natural environment; 3) economic impact; 4) public communication; 5) stakeholder service and support; and 6) response organization. Each of these areas has critical success factors. By assessing these critical success factors, as part of a Balanced Response Scorecard, a response organization has the chance to modify actions during the response to ensure the best opportunity for success. Once fully integrated, the response evaluation model could influence the response process and community relations, and lead to increasingly effective response planning and operations.

Minimizing consequences of an incident requires not only a sound management system, good people, and equipment, but also goals that can be measured against agreed upon standards or criteria. This baseline, although driven by the subtleties of each geographic area, will provide the opportunity for response organizations and communities to reach consensus on success, thereby improving our ability to protect our national interests and building an increased sense of shared stewardship.