



Contact: Ben Sherman, NOAA
301-713-3066
David Smith, BSEE
202-208-3985

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 31, 2012

Federal mapping tool that aided first responders in Gulf spill expanded to Arctic

A new federal interactive online mapping tool used by emergency responders during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill has been expanded to include the Arctic, and will help address numerous challenges in the Arctic posed by increasing ship traffic and proposed energy development.

NOAA and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), called the Environmental Response Management Application, known as ERMA®, an important step forward for the Arctic region.

"The addition of Arctic ERMA will be a tremendous benefit to responders in this rapidly developing region," said Jane Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "This scientific tool could provide essential information in responding to potential oil spills and pollution releases in the Arctic."

"We are committed to a comprehensive, science-based approach to energy policy in the Arctic," said Deputy Secretary of the Interior David J. Hayes. "This initiative is part of the Administration's commitment to continuing the expansion of safe and responsible production of our domestic resources and is an exciting step forward in our efforts to collect, synthesize and deliver relevant information to decision-makers."

"I know first-hand how critical it is for emergency responders to have the common operating picture ERMA provides," said BSEE director James A. Watson. "With the potential for oil and natural gas development, as well as increased shipping activity offshore Alaska, it is essential that responders have access to real-time information that provides full situational awareness. That's why I'm so pleased that BSEE was able to partner with NOAA to help complete this invaluable application."

ERMA brings together all of the available information needed for an effective emergency response in the Arctic. In an emergency situation, ERMA is equipped with near real-time oceanographic observations and weather data from NOAA, and critical environmental, commercial, and industrial data information from BSEE, and numerous other federal and state response agencies. Responders can further customize the tool with environmental, logistical, and operational data such as fishery closure areas, resources at risk maps, and mariner notices, depending on the need.

Integrating and synthesizing real-time and static data into a single interactive map, ERMA provides a quick visualization of the situation, improving communication and coordination

among responders and stakeholders. NOAA developed Arctic ERMA to be better prepared for escalating energy exploration and transportation activity in the region.

"After observing the positive way in which the ERMA assisted response efforts in the Gulf of Mexico, I believe it is highly important to support the continued development of an Arctic ERMA. It will be useful to communities, public agencies and the private sector as a tool to guide many activities," said Fran Ulmer, chair, U.S. Arctic Research Commission.

The Alaska Ocean Observing System, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of New Hampshire, as well as Alaska's Arctic boroughs, are working with NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration to keep this database current. Data includes the traditional and local knowledge of cultural and subsistence resources. They also include observations of the extent and concentration of sea ice, locations of ports and pipelines, and vulnerable environmental resources. Information in Arctic ERMA is pulled from many innovative and current sources, including data provided through a recent Memorandum of Agreement with Shell, Conoco-Phillips and Statoil USA that calls for the sharing of physical and biological data in the Arctic, as well as information gained during the August 2012 hydrographic survey cruise by the NOAA Ship *Fairweather*.

In addition to local and natural resource information, BSEE has contributed improved access to key environmental, commercial, and industrial data sources throughout lease areas in the Arctic. BSEE and other organizations will optimize real-time sensors to feed the data directly into ERMA during both potential oil releases and hazmat spill drills.

ERMA is frequently used as a planning and management tool in spill drills and trainings. Most recently, Arctic ERMA was used by NOAA, BSEE, and the U.S. Coast Guard during a Chukchi Sea oil spill drill.

Arctic ERMA is a product of a partnership among NOAA, BSEE, Oil Spill Recovery Institute and the University of New Hampshire. ERMA is currently available for eight geographic regions—Gulf of Mexico, New England, Atlantic, Caribbean, Southwest, Pacific Islands, Pacific Northwest, and Arctic.

Today's announcement is part of the ongoing efforts of the Interagency Working Group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska, which was established by President Obama in July 2011. Chaired by Department of the Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes, the working group coordinates the efforts of federal agencies responsible for overseeing the safe and responsible development of onshore and offshore energy in Alaska. The group's goal is to improve the federal government's efficiency, ensuring that resource development projects in Alaska comply with health, safety, and environmental protection standards while reducing our dependence on foreign oil. For more information, go to <http://www.doi.gov/alaskaenergy>.

The public can view the Gulf of Mexico version of ERMA online by visiting <http://gomex.erma.noaa.gov/erma.html>.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on Facebook, Twitter and our other social media channels at <http://www.noaa.gov/socialmedia/>.

On the Web:

Arctic ERMA: <https://www.erma.unh.edu/arctic>
NOAA Office of Response & Restoration: <http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/>
Department of the Interior Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement:
<http://www.bsee.gov/>