U.S. Coast Guard | National Strike Force

2011
YEAR IN REVIEW

Inside

AT A GLANCE

Petty Officer 1st Class Benedict Lizama and Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Shannon of the Pacific Strike Team enter a contamination zone during an exercise involving abandoned, leaking drums in Novato, Calif., Feb. 16, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

FEATURES

ON THE COVER:

Students at the Oil Spill Recovery Technician course observe skimming operations in a test tank at the Ohmsett training facility in Leonardo, N.J., May 10, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.
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Commander
National Strike Force

U.S. Coast Guard photo illustration

The NSF welcomed Capt. David Haynes in 2011 as its new commander. Haynes, a former commanding officer of the Atlantic Strike Team, sat down for a Q & A session to talk about what's ahead for the NSF.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES THE NSF UNIQUE TO THE U.S. COAST GUARD?

"We're a specialized entity within the Coast Guard specifically designed to respond at a moment's notice to any type of oil or hazardous materials release, anywhere, and provide rapid, specialized support to incident commanders. The Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which came out of the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989, and other legal and regulatory mandates gives us that responsibility."

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS WHILE YOU ARE HERE IN ELIZABETH CITY, N.C.?

"I want our customers to know that we're a vital asset, not just to the Coast Guard, but to the rest of the nation. I want to make sure that the services we provide are the right services and that we continue to provide those services efficiently and effectively. At the same time, we need to understand our history and get back to the basics of providing a quintessential service that no one else can provide. Along with that, I want to refocus our energy on reconnecting with our customer base within the response community."

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THE NSF?

"Our future is bright. As a result of a recent Coast Guard-wide internal review, we'll eventually be placed under the Atlantic Area command. Our mission, our vision, our responsibilities won't change, but working under an operational commander will make us more visible as a national response asset to be called upon in times of disaster."

WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?

"I love the whole strike force concept - the idea of responding to disasters and providing a service to the American public. As a former strike team commanding officer, and now as commander of the entire National Strike Force, I get to work with some of the most dedicated, professional, and talented people in the Coast Guard. When I see them making a difference to a community during a disaster, it brings a great sense of personal satisfaction."

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE RESPONSE?

"For Hurricane Katrina I was brought in as the planning section chief for Adm. Allen, who was the Principle Federal Official, to help establish his incident command post in New Orleans. The memory of New Orleans as I drove into the city is one that will stay with me forever. It was a city vacant of people, it was a total disaster… water, carnage, upturned cars, fires, blown out windows, it was like one of those movies where you are the only one left in the city. It was just an incredible experience, and it was hugely rewarding to be even a small part of rebuilding the city."

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE QUOTE OR A MANTRA THAT DRIVES YOU?

"Our vision statement is to be the world's best responders, any time, any place, for any hazard. What this means to me, is that to be a first-class responder, we must take control of everything we can, as quickly as we can, and influence everything else. That's my definition of a leader during a disaster, and we've got to accept that challenge when someone calls for assistance."

Heritage and Future

National Strike Force

Our Heritage

The National Strike Force, originally comprised of three 17-member strike teams, was established in 1973 under the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Control Plan - or, the National Contingency Plan - which was a direct result of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972.

The NSF's roles and responsibilities in supporting the National Response System expanded through the years under subsequent major environmental legislation including the Clean Water Act of 1977 and the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

Following the enactment of the Graham-Ruddman Act in 1986 and the OPA 90, the NSF was established in its current configuration.

Other regulatory authorities that govern the NSF are the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act; the National Response Framework; and the National Response Framework Catastrophic Incident Annex.

The addition of the National Strike Force Coordination Center in 1991 took the NSF to a new level of organizational and support capability.

In addition to coordinating the activities of the three teams and the Public Information Assist Team, the NSFCC also increased NSF support activities.

Our Present

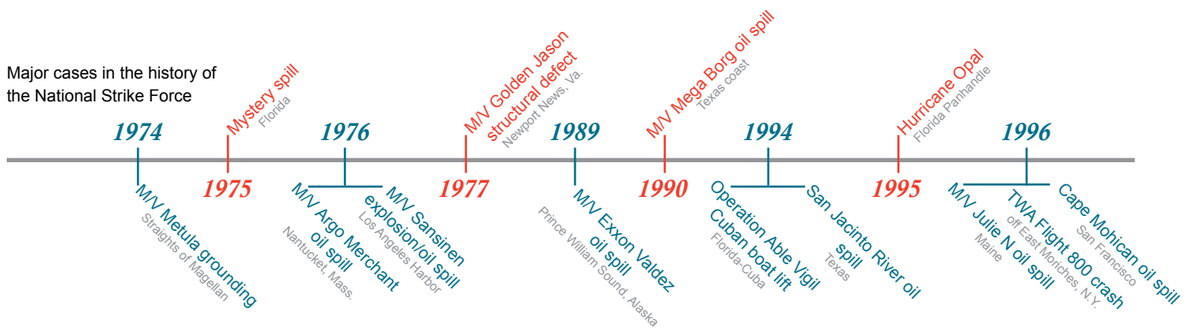
Today's NSF totals more than 300 active duty, civilian, and reserve personnel and includes the Coordination Center, the Atlantic Strike Team, the Gulf Strike Team, the Pacific Strike Team, and the PIAT.

The NSF's area of responsibility consists of all Coast Guard districts and Environmental Protection Agency regions. Additionally, the NSF can respond internationally.

Personnel undergo a rigorous training program and are equipped to respond to oil discharges, hazardous materials releases, and weapons of mass destruction incidents. The NSF can assist Federal On-Scene Coordinators and incident commanders with preparedness and incident management activities, and staffing of critical incident management team positions.

Members of the Atlantic Strike Team monitor air quality and coordinate equipment and personnel wash-downs amid the rubble of the, Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center attack in New York City. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class William Barry.

Major cases in the history of the National Strike Force



Two Atlantic Strike Team members enter the "hot zone" at the Quincy, Mass. Shipyard dressed in Level B Saranac suits to ensure their safety. Roughly 100 drums containing unknown chemicals and several other hazardous materials were assessed for safe removal. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Brent Erb.

The strike teams also train Coast Guard units in environmental pollution response, test and evaluate pollution response equipment, and operate as liaisons with response agencies within their areas of responsibilities.

The PIAT provides crisis media relations support to FOSCs during major or high visibility Coast Guard incidents. Additionally, the four-member team conducts joint information center training, media relations and risk communication training nationwide.

The NSFCC is responsible for oversight of the National Maintenance Contract, which is essential to the readiness of pre-positioned spill response equipment, the classification of private sector Oil Spill Removal Organizations, the management of the Response Resource Inventory, and the development of an NSF logistics network.

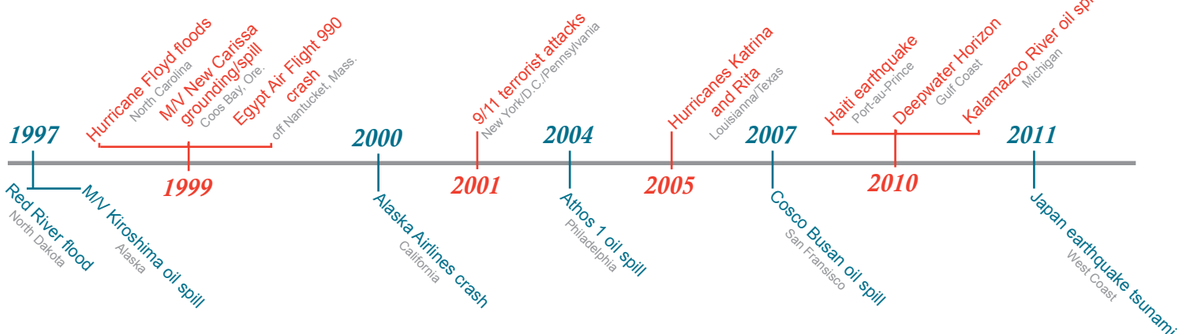
Our Future

The Coast Guard is changing. As mission areas expand across the service, the NSF is changing and evolving as well.

In the coming months, the NSF will be placed under the Atlantic Area command as a result of a service-wide internal reorganization. Despite the move, the NSF will continue to provide the services FOSCs and incident commanders have come to expect.

Crewmembers aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Kakui load boom, a floating marker designed to contain oil spills, preceding the escort of the Hawaii Superferry Alakai. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric J. Chandler.

"The NSF will remain one of the pillars of the Coast Guard's marine environmental response community," said Capt. David Haynes, commander of the NSF. "My goal is to always look ahead and keep the NSF aligned with the rest of the Coast Guard, while at the same time honoring our rich legacy of service in the oil spill response community."



Coordination Center
National Strike Force

About:

The National Strike Force Coordination Center in Elizabeth City, N.C. was established as a result of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. The 26 member staff manages all aspects of the National Strike Force, from team deployment and training to equipment maintenance and national preparedness.

The NSFCC ensures that the NSF operates in a cohesive, effective, and efficient manner within the National Response System, minimizing the adverse impact to the public and environment from oil discharges, hazardous material releases, and weapons of mass destruction incidents through preparedness and emergency response.

For 2011, four mission areas merit special focus in the post-Deepwater Horizon operating environment: the Response Resource Inventory, the Oil Spill Recovery Technician course, the National Maintenance Contract, and the Preparedness for Response Exercise Program.

"These programs play an important role and are integral to the Coast Guard's marine environmental response capability," said Lt. Cmdr. Tedd Hutley, the NSFCC's operations officer. The Coast Guard's pre-positioned oil spill response equipment has been rebuilt through the NMC; the OSRT course has experienced a dramatic increase in attendance; expansion of the RRI and greater coordination with Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement has bolstered preparedness for offshore response. The NSFCC's role within the NRS and responsibility for the nation's preparedness has never been so important."

Programs and resources:

Response Resource Inventory

The NSFCC maintains the RRI, a national database of Oil Spill Removal Organization response resources. Mandated by the OPA 90, the inventory provides FOSCs and On-Scene Coordinators with the ability to query OSRO-owned/contracted response equipment inventories and analyze response capabilities throughout the United States.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Wyatt Ingram of the NSFCC operates the RRI database in San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 30, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

Additionally, the RRI provides OSROs with tiered classifications based on their response resource inventory, geographic location, and their ability to effectively mobilize those resources.

The RRI was updated in 2011 to include dispersant stockpiles, dispersant application systems, and dedicated salvage and marine firefighting equipment. These enhancements, among others, provide users with an unprecedented national OSRO response resource listing.

"These additions have significantly enhanced the RRI's ability to provide timely and accurate mechanical, dispersant, and salvage and marine firefighting response resource information to FOSCs," said Lt. Irvin Jones, RRI coordinator at the NSFCC.

A joint Coast Guard and BSEE workgroup was established in 2011 to improve national oil discharge planning, preparedness, and response for offshore facilities. In support of these initiatives, BSEE and NSFCC personnel conducted several joint OSRO inspections. This partnership has proven valuable in aligning BSEE and Coast Guard regulatory authorities and preparedness oversight activities.

NSFCC IN 2011

46 Preventive Maintenance Verifications conducted

128 Preparedness Assessment Verification site visits conducted

51 Exercises supported

420 Oil Spill Removal Organizations in the Response Resourse Inventory

56 Oil Spill Recovery Technician students

24 Vessel of Opportunity Skimming Systems

16 Spilled Oil Recovery Systems

During 2011, the NSFCC provided front line customer support to over 420 classified and non-classified OSROs, completing over 1,050 RRI account modifications. This support included preparedness assessment visits to over 128 OSRO sites in 14 Captain of the Port zones to verify both mechanical and dispersant equipment and the provision of RRI training to OSROs. Additionally, NSFCC personnel processed and issued over 160 classifications in 27 COTP and Alternate Classified Cities zones.

(Left) Adam Evans, Lt. Irvin Jones and Petty Officer 2nd Class Wyatt Ingram discuss the NSF with Randy Anzalone of the Marine Spill Response Corporation during the 2011 Clean Gulf Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 30, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

Programs and resources continued:

Oil Spill Recovery Technician Course

The National Strike Force's Oil Spill Recovery Technician course, the only one of its kind in the Coast Guard, uses a combination of classroom and hands-on training to teach personnel how to effectively and safely deploy vessel-based oil skimming and recovery systems. These systems, which include the Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System and Spilled Oil Recovery System, were used extensively during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill recovery operations with great success.

The OSRT course is held three times a year at the National Oil Spill Response Research & Renewable Energy Test Facility in Leonardo, N.J. The facility features a 2.6 million gallon tank, which allows students to use the VOSS and SORS equipment in a controlled yet realistic environment.

"We've witnessed a real resurgence in class attendance since the Deepwater Horizon spill," said Dale Hemenway, the OSRT course manager at the National Strike Force Coordination Center, adding that because of Deepwater Horizon only 16 students were able to attend the course in fiscal year 2010. In fiscal year 2011, 56 students went through the course.

"The feedback we get from students is overwhelmingly positive," Hemenway said. "They really appreciate the opportunity to get their hands dirty and skim oil the same way they would if they were at a real spill."

Hemenway said the course has enjoyed increased visibility from senior leadership throughout the federal government who are interested in what's being done to increase the capability and proficiency of responders.

Oil recovery efficiency is calculated in a test tank using real oil spilled into differing sea conditions at the Ohmsett training facility in Leonardo, N.J., May 10, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Dale Hemenway.

"The entire program continues to ensure the Coast Guard's Oil Pollution Act of 1990 mandated oil spill emergency response capability remains in a high state of response readiness," said Hemenway.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Carol Baillie, center, of the Atlantic Strike Team provides coaching at Operation Down Under in Duluth, Minn., Aug. 24, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class George Degener.

Preparedness for Response Exercise Program

The NSFCC is highly engaged in the Coast Guard's Preparedness for Response Exercise Program. The OPA 90 mandates that government agencies participate in PREP; industry use is voluntary, but encouraged, since it meets the exercise requirements of the numerous regulatory agencies.

Jim Snyder is the NSFCC's liaison to the PREP program. He said the NSF routinely provides experienced members to support exercises as Incident Command System coaches and players, which requires extensive coordination and planning, sometimes as long as a year in advance. In fiscal year 2011, he coordinated NSF support for 51 separate exercises, 20 more than in fiscal year 2010.

Snyder also spends considerable time reviewing area and regional contingency plans to ensure NSF capabilities and contact information is accurate.

"These contingency plans are blueprints that help the Federal On-Scene Coordinator during the initial hours and days of an oil or hazardous substance release," said Snyder. "However, every area is different so it's important that each plan is reviewed regularly and exercised in order to make improvements to the region's overall response posture."

Contractors install new foam-filled boom into boom containers in Portsmouth, Va. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

National Maintenance Contract

The National Maintenance Contract supports the annual preventive maintenance, repair and refurbishment, quality control, and training on Coast Guard-owned VOSS and SORS. Administered by the NSFCC, its staff makes annual visits to many Coast Guard pre-positioned oil response equipment sites.

The Coast Guard deployed over 2,300 pieces of its own oil spill response equipment during the Deepwater Horizon response, representing 84 percent of the service's total inventory. In February of 2011, the NSFCC took the lead and began the arduous task of making sure BP returned all the equipment to pre-Deepwater Horizon condition.

"Because so much of the inventory had been used, it was critical that we challenge poor workmanship and material defects in the replacement equipment," said Mike Crickard, the NMC contracting officer's technical representative at the NSFCC.

In 2011, NMC personnel were engaged extensively in the oil spill response equipment replacement process, conducting over 46 manufacturer site visits to ensure that over $6.2 million worth of skimming, pumping, and containment equipment were designed and manufactured to meet or exceed the stringent Coast Guard quality and specification standards.

"Our efforts returned the equipment back to an operational ready-for-issue condition so that each site has skimming and containment capability, and is postured to respond to the next spill event," said Crickard.

Students at the OSRT course prepare a skimming system for demonstration at the Ohmsett facility in Leonardo, N.J., May 10, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

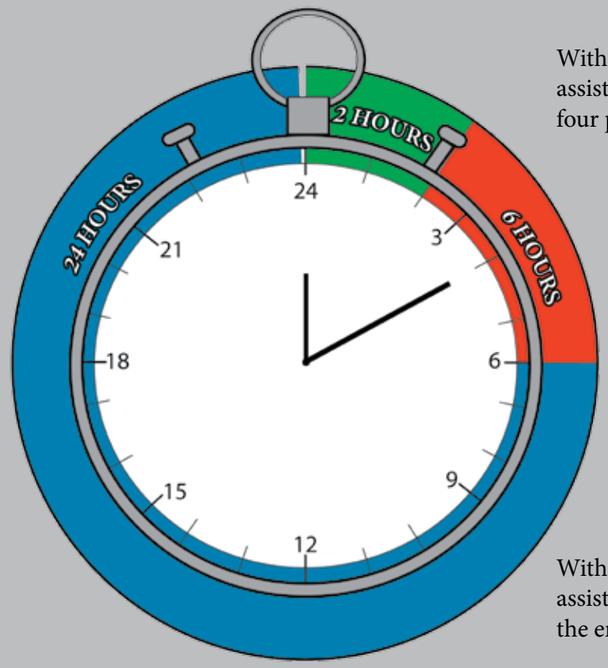
Petty Officer 2nd Class Adam Evans of the NSFCC conducts a joint preparedness assessment verification with the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement at an oil spill removal organization location in Long Beach, Calif., April 18, 2011. BSEE photo.

Readiness

National Strike Force Readiness Standards*

Getting to the scene of a disaster early is critical - whether it's an oil spill, a chemical, biological, or radiological materials release, or a hurricane.

One call to the NSF means that technical support is immediately available, and in as little as two hours, members of a strike team are on their way, bringing with them unique skill sets and specialized equipment to provide the full gamut of services to help Federal On-Scene Coordinators meet the demands of any disaster.



Within two hours of calling for NSF assistance an advance team of up to four people is ready to deploy.

Within six hours of calling for NSF assistance up to eight additional strike team members are ready to deploy.

Within six hours of calling for NSF assistance two Public Information Assist Team members are ready to deploy.

Within 24 hours of calling for assistance additional resources across the entire NSF can be made available.

** Deployment times depicted are based on basic NSF Standard Operating Guidelines. Actual deployment times and team composition will vary based on the specific personnel and equipment needs of the response*

Capabilities

Strike teams launched on 59 cases in 2011, providing assistance in the form of:

- Technical support
- Site assessment & safety monitoring
- Incident Command System establishment & support
- Air, water, & soil sampling
- Damage control, salvage, & decontamination
- Contractor oversight
- Shoreline Assessment & Cleanup Teams
- Hazadous material containment, inventory & categorization
- Chemical, biological, & radiological detection, sampling, & identification
- Levels A, B, C HAZMAT qualified
- Mobile command post support
- Evidence collection
- Resource & cost documentation
- In-situ burn & dispersant use support
- Crisis communication & joint information center establishment
- Exercise support

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How do I request assistance?

A. Contact the nearest strike team or the National Response Center at 800-424-8802 for direct deployment of needed assets for National Contingency Plan incidents. For non-environmental response incidents, a request for forces needs to be filed with the Deployable Operations Group.

Q. If I am uncertain if an incident requires support from the strike team, what should I do?

A. Call. A strike team member will discuss the incident and specifically recommend what equipment or personnel resources they can provide to support the response.

Q. Where can I obtain an equipment list for various Oil Spill Removal Organizations in a specific area?

A. The Response Resource Inventory contains equipment capabilities and locations for classified OSROs. Contact the Response Support Division at 252-331-6000 or the website at: https://cgrri.uscg.mil

Q. How do I request the Public Information Assist Team?

A. Public information professionals skilled in the Incident Command System, joint information center, risk communication and crisis media relations can be requested for NCP incidents directly through the NSFCC or through the National Response Center at 800-424-8802. For non-NCP incidents, a request for forces needs to be filed with the DOG.

Q. Who pays for a strike team to respond?

A. In most cases, the FOSC has the $1 billion Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund or the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act fund to pay for associated costs resulting from oil spills or substantial threats of oil or hazardous material spills to navigable waterways of the United States. If the incident does not meet either of those funding specifications, the requesting agency would fund the strike teams' response through the Stafford Act or other means.

Atlantic Strike Team

National Strike Force

About:

The Atlantic Strike Team is located at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Fort Dix, N.J. The AST's area of responsibility covers the Coast Guard's 1st, 5th, and 9th districts, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the 7th District and the northern portion of the 8th District. This corresponds to the Environmental Protection Agency's 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 7th regions.

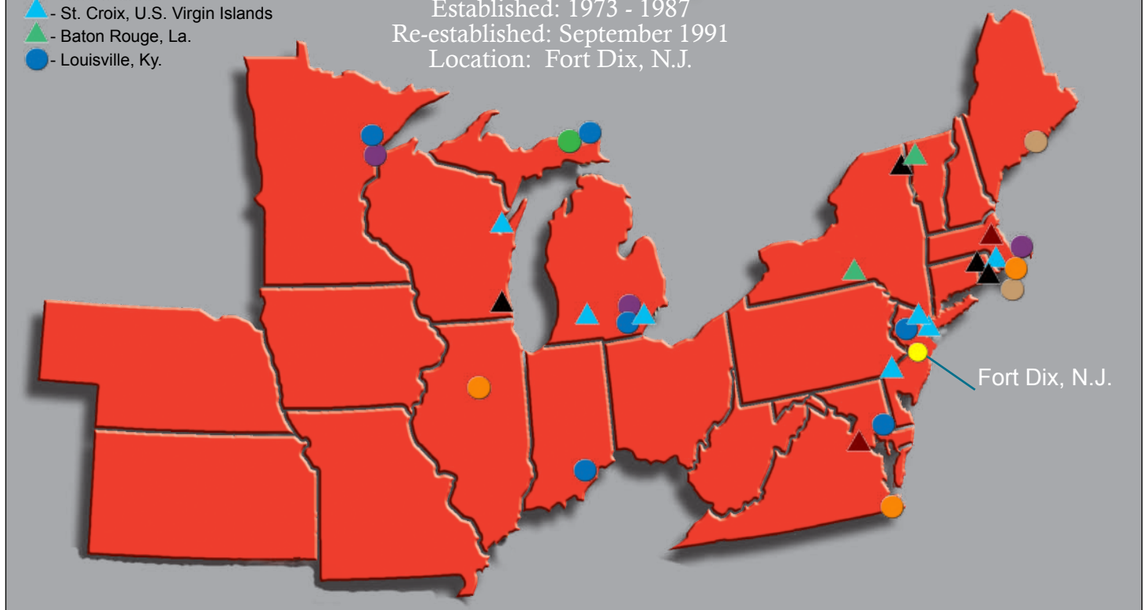
The 81 active-duty, reserve, civilian and auxiliary members supported both Coast Guard and EPA Federal On-Scene Coordinators in a variety of interesting and complex chemical and oil spill response cases in 2011.

The AST also participated in numerous preparedness and readiness training exercises across the nation.

Team Summary

Established: 1973 - 1987
Re-established: September 1991
Location: Fort Dix, N.J.

Not Pictured:
- St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands
- Baton Rouge, La.
- Louisville, Ky.



Calendar year 2011 cases
- Oil - 5
- Hazardous Waste - 8
- Biological - 0
- Natural Disaster - 3
- Other - 2

Total - 18

Exercises and training
- Full Scale Exercise - 7
- Spilled Oil Recovery System - 3
- Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System - 4
- Area Maritime Security Training Exercise Program - 1
- Preparedness for Response Exercise Program - 2

Total - 17

Members of the AST participate in a Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System exercise aboard the 160-foot Coast Guard Cutter Kennebec, homeported in Portsmouth, Va., June 21, 2011. The VOSS is an oil skimming system that is prestaged in 22 locations around the United States. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Top 10 cases of 2011:

Coast Guard support

1. Sector Southeastern New England requested assistance at the Capital Terminal in East Providence, R.I., for a pipeline rupture oil spill in September.

2. Sector New York requested support with tactical decontamination capabilities for the United Nations General Assembly in New York City in September.

3. Sector Lake Michigan requested assistance when a mudslide pushed coal ash into Lake Michigan in Oak Creek, Wis., in October.

4. Sector Southeastern New England requested salvage assistance for a sunken construction barge carrying 3,000 gallons of petroleum products in Newport Harbor in Newport, R.I., in October.

EPA support

5. EPA Region 2 requested assistance with an airborne release at the Hovensa Refinery in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands in January.

6. EPA Region 5 requested assistance at the Chilton Plating facility in Chilton, Wis., for the removal of hazardous materials in June.

7. EPA Region 1 requested assistance with hazardous material assessments after Hurricane Irene hit Vermont in August.

8. EPA Region 2 requested waterside hazardous material assessment and recovery support in Binghamton, N.Y., for the response to Tropical Storm Lee in September.

9. EPA Region 2 requested assistance in September with salvage of the sunken tug William McAllister in Port Kent, N.Y.

10. EPA Region 5 requested assistance with on-site chemical hazard identification at a chemical facility in Detroit, Mich., in November and December.

Road construction RUPTURES PIPELINE

Sector Southeastern New England requests assistance follwing the release of No. 2 low sulfur diesel fuel

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young
Photos provided by the Atlantic Strike Team

The prevention department from Coast Guard Sector Southeastern New England requested support from the Atlantic Strike Team after a road construction worker using an excavator ruptured a two mile long oil transfer pipeline between the oil storage facility and the marine transfer terminal of the Capital Terminal facility in East Providence, R.I., Aug. 31.

A barge at the facility was offloading its cargo through the pipeline at the time of the accident, causing an estimated 70,000 gallons of No. 2 low sulfur diesel fuel to spill into the roadway, and threatening the nearby Seekonk River.

Officials with the Coast Guard, East Providence Fire Department, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Rhode Island Department of Transportation, as well as with the facility and the construction company, established a unified command to coordinate the cleanup efforts.

Upon arrival, AST members integrated with sector personnel and helped establish an incident command post.

"ICS organization was key," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Daniel Fontaine with the AST. "Once everybody got organized, we were able to attack the response in a more effective way."

Although workers at the Capital Terminal facility had quickly secured the pipeline in order to repair it, there was still a maximum possible discharge of 164,000 gallons; it was imperative that the response be tightly organized to handle any contingency.

"The AST members quickly came up and were able to dedicate themselves 100 percent to the response," said Cmdr. Paul Lattanzi, the Coast Guard incident commander for the spill. "During long-term responses like this one, to have that continuity day-to-day, makes for a much more successful response."

In addition to helping establish the command post, AST members also provided input on cleanup strategies.

"It rained for three or four days and made everything worse, but it did bring up the sheen and we could see where the leaks were," said Petty Officer 1st Class Marcus Leibowitz with the AST. "We were able to help with boom placing strategies after the rain stopped."

Lattanzi said that as of Sept. 28, responders had recovered more than 60 percent of the spilled oil, and continue to recover 50-100 gallons a day. However, he said the biggest measure of success is the fact that of the 70,000 gallons spilled, only about 50 entered the Seekonk River.

"This was a great opportunity to work with the sector because we were able to unify so well for this response," said Fontaine. "This is important because we can more effectively gauge how we will work together in future responses."

The damaged section of the pipeline is prepped for a temporary patch.

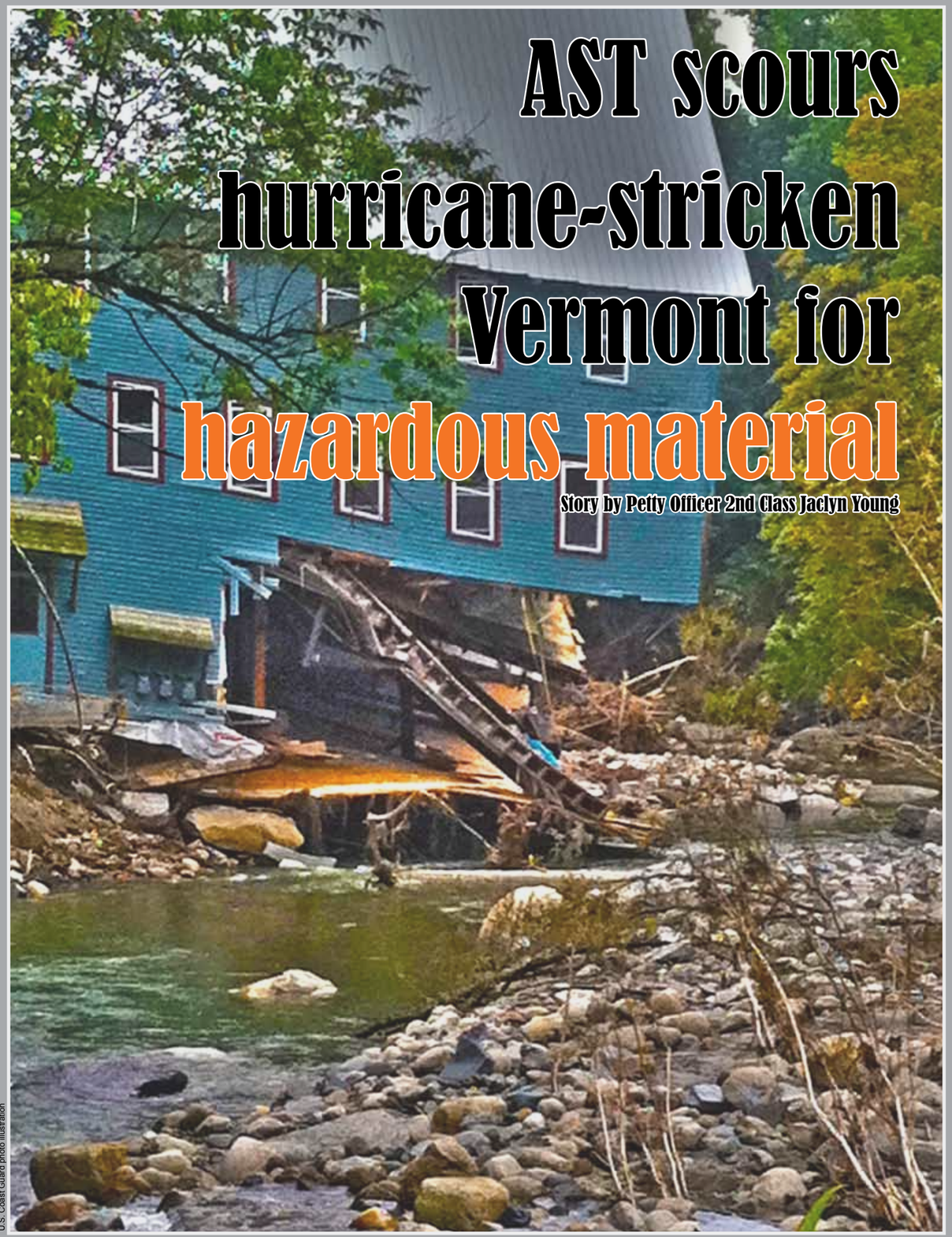
Pipeline repair was halted for days when heavy rain displaced sorbent boom and pads.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Daniel Fontaine with the AST logs sample information during cleanup operations, Sept. 6, 2011.

Contractors conduct cleanup operations at the Capital Terminal facility, Sept. 4, 2011 after an estimated 70,000 gallons of No. 2 low sulfur diesel fuel leaked from a ruptured pipeline. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

AST scours hurricane-stricken Vermont for hazardous material

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young



U.S. Coast Guard photo illustration

Hurricane Irene produced record rainfall throughout the state of Vermont Aug. 28, 2011, creating the worst flooding the state has seen in 84 years. Heavy rain combined with rivers that were already swollen from a wet summer and last winter's heavy snowfall resulted in statewide devastation.

The Atlantic Strike Team deployed six responders beginning just days after the hurricane hit. The deployed members were tasked with assisting the Environmental Protection Agency Region 1 with conducting household hazardous materials assessments for more than a thousand homes and various small businesses.

"Throughout the first week we were there we traveled all over Vermont," said Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Foster, with the AST. "With two vehicles, we put 3,000 miles on each one in two days."

As communities began the difficult job of rebuilding, the people affected by the flooding were faced with having to separate their household hazardous materials from other debris in order to prevent threats to health or the environment. The strike team was there to help homeowners get their damages assessed and find the appropriate contractors for the cleanup and disposal. However, getting to those homes posed no easy task.

The raging rivers caused major destruction in and around several towns and communities in the state, and nearly a dozen towns were cut off from the outside world because the excessive flooding had knocked out bridges and destroyed roadways. In some areas, homes had been knocked off their foundations and were floating in lakes and rivers.

Petty Officer 1st Class Kenny Cook with the AST conducts a hazardous material assessment for homes and small business near Burlington, Vt., Aug. 31, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Responders encountered hazardous materials in a garage in Bethel, Vt., Aug. 31, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo

"At times it was overwhelming because we were covering such a large area with so many roads and bridges washed out," said Foster. "The representatives from the Vermont State Agency of Natural Resources, Water Supply Division were very helpful because they knew all the side and back roads to help us get around."

Foster said the strike team assessed about 1,000 homes throughout the state. He said some of the reoccurring finds were home heating oil tanks that had been tipped over from flooding, as well as paint cans, contaminated construction debris and 100-to-500 gallon propane tanks.

Additionally, Foster said that one of the biggest hazards they found were propane tanks wedged underneath bridges, pushed there from the force of the flooding.

Once all of the site assessments were completed, the strike team turned their attention to contractor monitoring at some of the sites.

Foster said the vast square miles of land left devastated in Irene's wake was so large that residents found it challenging to get back to their homes and businesses and start the cleanup process. He said it was rewarding for him and the other team members to offer resources and support that the residents could access during a difficult time.

"We all had a sense of accomplishment because we were helping people with their homes," Foster said.

Local responders assess the hazards of a small business, Aug. 31, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

CLEARING THE WAY FOR DEMOLITION

Atlantic Strike Team assists with removal of hazardous materials

Contractors work to remove hazardous materials at the Chilton Plating facility, June 28, 2011. The facility held more than 300 drums containing hazardous waste. Photo courtesy of the AST.

STORY BY PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS JACLYN YOUNG

An On-Scene Coordinator with the Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 requested the Atlantic Strike Team's assistance in June to help with the removal of about 300 55-gallon drums containing hazardous and explosive materials from an unused plating company facility in Chilton, Wis.

The plating company was located within a one-mile radius of many commercial, industrial, and residential areas and conducted chromium, zinc, tin, aluminum, and copper plating jobs before closing in 2007. It had been left neglected for three years, because the owner lacked the resources to properly dispose of the unused waste.

"The county wanted to demolish the building but needed drums moved," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Rodney Wedner with the AST, who independently represented the AST at the site for three weeks. "The strike team was needed for this case to help with air monitoring and to act as safety officers for the EPA."

Many of the drums and containers were in poor condition; visible stains and residue indicated evidence of past spills and leaks. Furthermore, the EPA's preliminary assessment showed that incompatible materials were stored together, with drums and containers precariously stacked around the facility. Wedner said this presented a risk not only to trespassers, but also to emergency responders in the event of a fire or explosion.

Wedner said the response was comprised of a small crew of EPA personnel, the AST, and contractors. In addition to site remediation during drum removal, AST provided multiple services.

"After we did the drum inventory we saw that the types of waste we had were very dangerous and we wanted to make sure we had extra safety oversight," said Kathy Halbur, the OSC at the site. "The NSF brings more authority, and it was nice to have the federal presence."

Wedner also gave tours of the facility to local emergency officials to help coordinate the roles and responsibilities during cleanup operations.

"We were really there to protect the people," said Wedner. "We would have shut down operations or looked at evacuating people at any time if we had found a threat to the community during the response."

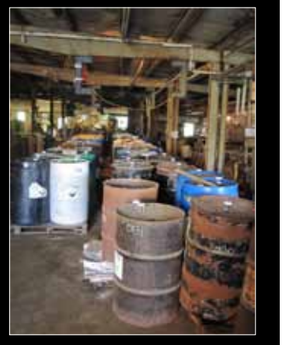


Photo courtesy of the AST.

Gulf Strike Team

National Strike Force

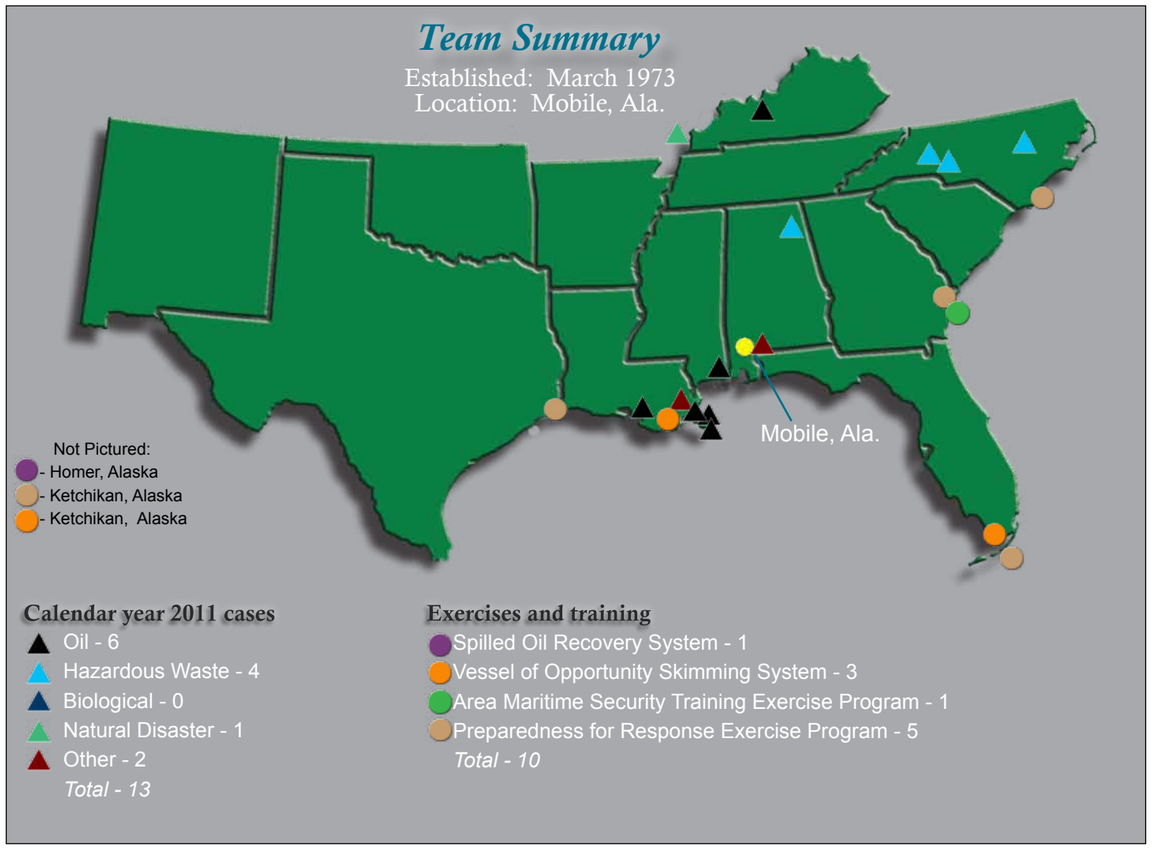
About:

The Gulf Strike Team is based in Mobile, Ala. The GST's area of responsibility includes the Coast Guard's 7th District, with the exception of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the southern portion of the 8th District and part of the 5th District.

This corresponds to the Environmental Protection Agency's 4th and 6th regions. In addition to these areas the GST also has international responsibilities for South America, Central America and the Caribbean.

The 78 active-duty, reserve, civilian and auxiliary members of the team responded to a variety of interesting and complex chemical and oil spill response cases in 2011 while supporting both Coast Guard and EPA Federal On-Scene Coordinators.

The GST also participated in numerous preparedness and readiness training exercises across the nation.



Members of the GST dress out in Level B protective clothing during routine training at the unit in Mobile, Ala., Feb. 10, 2011. Level B protective clothing includes a one-piece ensemble with a self-contained breathing apparatus worn outside the garment. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Top 10 cases of 2011:

Coast Guard support

1. Sector New Orleans requested assistance with an abandoned pipeline leak in Quarantine Bay, La., in March.

2. Marine Safety Unit Morgan City requested assistance with a mystery oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in March.

3. Marine Safety Unit Paducah and the Army Corps of Engineers requested assistance for a cresting levee during flooding in Cairo, Ill., in April.

4. Sector Mobile requested support with a grounded barge in the Mississippi Sound in Pascagoula, Miss., in April.

5. Sector New Orleans requested assistance in Breton Sound for an oil spill near Baptiste Collette, La., in June.

6. Sector New Orleans requested incident command support for the Ceydico Manila Village response in Lafitte, La., in September.

7. Sector New Orleans requested assistance with an oil well leak in Lafitte, La., in September.

EPA Support

8. EPA Region 4 requested assistance at Bio-Tech Industries in Newton, N.C., for a hazardous material drum removal operation in January.

9. EPA Region 4 requested support with oil well capping in Fordsville, Ky., in January.

10. EPA Region 4 requested assistance with drum removal at the Hoss/Moore tank site in Statesville, N.C., in March.

Strike team, Coast Guard respond to record-level flooding

Written by Petty Officer 2nd Class Bill Colclough and Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield
Photos by Petty Officer 2nd Class Bill Colclough

The National Strike Force responds to almost any type of natural disaster, and the flooding in Cairo, Ill., in April and May 2011 was just one of many examples of NSF members deploying to assist the public, partner agencies, and Coast Guard sectors.

With extreme high water and heavy rains threatening to flood the town of Cairo, and mounting pressure on the entire Mississippi River system, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers activated the Bird's Point-New Madrid Floodway Operations Plan for the first time since 1937. The activation allowed for the opening of 11,000 feet of levees along the Ohio River to provide relief to the floodwall protecting tens of thousands of people living at the intersection of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.

Cmdr. Claudia Gelzer, the commanding officer of Marine Safety Unit Paducah, said she requested NSF support for the operation because of the pollution potential posed by farming equipment and chemicals in the Missouri flood plain.

"We had a lot of competing priorities, but in the back of my mind the potential for pollution in the rivers was a real concern," said Gelzer. "Having the strike team there to … identify those hazards and do the best they could to minimize them, allowed me to focus on the security and the other operational pieces of the mission."

Petty Officer 1st Class Patrick O'Hare, a marine science technician with the Gulf Strike Team, said he filled several roles for the seven days he was on scene.

"My main job when I first got there was to help Marine Safety Unit Paducah set up the Incident Command System," said O'Hare. ICS is a standard organizational system used during disasters to provide uniformity and continuity during multi-agency and complex responses.

In addition, O'Hare said he went on overflights of the area in order to provide a birds-eye assessment of where potential pollution dangers may exist, which allowed area commanders to better assign resources and equipment.

Overall, Coast Guard and local agencies rescued nine people from their homes. Disaster Area Response Teams and local fire rescue teams rescued six in Morehouse, Mo., and a DART rescued three elderly women from their flooded house in Smithland, Ky., following the voluntary evacuation of the town's 352 residents.

"Knowing that the units involved were looking to me to step up and assist with safety issues, as well as standing by as a technical specialist in the event that the pollution issues grew, made this response one of the bigger challenges I've faced so far as a member of the strike team," said O'Hare. "That in itself made the whole experience very rewarding."

A Coast Guard Disaster Assistance Response Team from Cincinnati, Ohio offloads sandbags with local residents to stem flooding in their neighborhood, May 4, 2011 in Brookport, Ill. The Coast Guard assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and several state and local agencies to help minimize damage to property, structures, and to help save lives from historic flood levels.

Response boats prepare to conduct joint flood response operations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers along the banks of the Mississippi River near Wickliffe, Ky., May 1, 2011.

Petty Officer 1st Class Kenneth Bond and Petty Officer 3rd Class Kevin O'Rourke return from an air monitoring assessment during the detonation phase of removing toxic cylinders from a horse pasture in Statesville, N.C., March 8, 2011.

GST SEARCHES HORSE PASTURE FOR BURIED CONTAMINANTS

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young Photos provided by the Gulf Strike Team

A former scrap yard turned horse pasture caught the attention of Environmental Protection Agency officials when local residents discovered cylinders containing ethylene oxide buried throughout the Statesville, N.C., pasture.

The Gulf Strike Team deployed two members to assist the EPA Region 4 On-Scene Coordinator in March with assessing and clearing the property of buried solid waste and compressed gas cylinders containing the extremely dangerous product.

Ethylene oxide is a flammable, colorless gas at temperatures above 51.3 degrees Fahrenheit that smells like ether if present at toxic levels. It is found in the production of solvents, antifreeze, textiles, detergents, adhesives, polyurethane foam, and pharmaceuticals.

"After our initial site survey we located half a dozen cylinders above ground and began drafting a remediation plan to detonate the cylinders with the local bomb squad," said Petty Officer 1st Class Kenneth Bond from the GST.

Bond said they dug shallow depressions in the ground and the bomb squad placed explosives on the cylinders to blow them up. Afterward, the GST did post-explosion air monitoring to make sure the product was gone.

"The detonation would burn the product off of the cylinders and then we had the containers decontaminated and sent for scrap metal," said Bond. "Over the course of two days we detonated 12 cylinders."

Air monitoring was conducted prior to, during, and after the detonation, and samples were taken to ensure that no significant exposure was present.

After the site was secured from the detonation, efforts were then focused on ensuring that no flammable levels of ethylene oxide remained in the holes. All trenches and holes were filled in and the site was released back to the property owner.

"This was a very unique case, and our skills proved useful for the sampling and remediation phase as well as acting as a liaison between the EPA and the bomb squad," said Bond.

Because this case was extremely rare, the GST also took the opportunity to train other team members who were responding to other cases in the area.

"This was definitely a great learning environment," said Bond. "Our forté is responding to maritime oil spills, so getting so many strike teamers to observe was a great benefit to the team. We were able to improve everyone's experience levels because this response was all outside-of-the-box type thinking."

A member of the bomb squad places charges on an ethylene oxide cylinder ready for detonation, March 8, 2011.

An AreaRae, which is a specialized gas meter, was used post explosion to detect if all of the toxic product had burned off in the blast, March 8, 2011.

Responders conduct an initial site survey before handling any contaminated cylinders, March 8, 2011.

Dangerous conditions at the site required immediate removal action.

BIOTECH DRUM REMOVAL

Gulf Strike Team assists with the removal of hundreds of toxic drums in North Carolina

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young
Photos provided by the Gulf Strike Team

When a routine inspection in January at a Newton, N.C., facility revealed hundreds of rusted, dented, and punctured drums of corrosive, flammable and toxic substances, the Environmental Protection Agency called the Gulf Strike Team to help.

"As an On-Scene Coordinator, I determined that the BioTech facility posed a threat to public health and the environment, which warranted a time-critical removal action," said Kenneth Rhame, an OSC with EPA Region 4. "This determination was made on the basis that there was a large quantity of hazardous substances being stored in compromised containers, some of which were leaking, and some contained incompatible material located next to each other inside the facility."

Rhame said following the initial entry, it was obvious there was a threat, and the strike team was called to help ensure the disposal was done safely. There was a sense of urgency because of the facility's proximity to a high school and middle school.

The GST deployed two personnel to provide safety oversight and contractor monitoring services, roles they regularly fill at hazardous material sites; federal oversight is necessary to insure that cleanup workers are properly mitigating the threats in the facility and doing so safely.

Rhame said that because of the National Strike Force's expertise, the EPA often relies on them to fill the safety role at hazardous material sites. In this situation, he said, the GST's quick response meant the hazardous materials were disposed of before it was necessary to evacuate any of the nearby schools.

"They came in with monitoring equipment and were able to provide valuable oversight to see that drums were handled safely," Rhame said. "The GST was used because they possess the specialized expertise needed in dealing with safety concerns, air monitoring, and knowledge of chemical hazards."

Contractors at the BioTech facility work to remove hundreds of drums containing hazardous materials from the facility, Feb. 10, 2011. Many of the containers were damaged and posed a threat to surrounding communities.

A contractor works to remove hazardous material from a container during cleanup operations, Feb. 10, 2011.

Cleanup workers inspect drums filled with hazardous material, Feb. 10, 2011.

Pacific Strike Team

National Strike Force

About:

The Pacific Strike Team is based in Novato, Calif., and its area of responsibility covers the Coast Guard's 11th, 13th, 14th, and 17th districts, and the northwest portion of the 8th District.

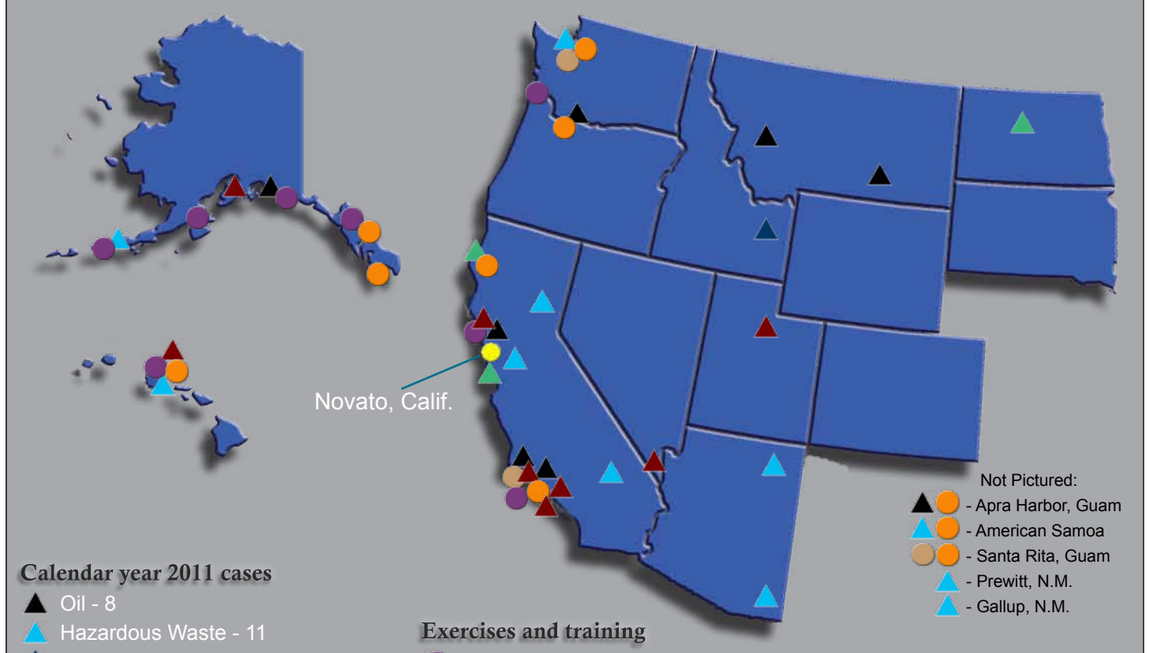
This corresponds to the Environmental Protection Agency's 7th, 9th, and 10th regions. Internationally, the PST covers Asia, the Arctic, Antarctic and western Canada.

The 63 active-duty, reserve, civilian and auxiliary members of the team supported both Coast Guard and EPA Federal On-Scene Coordinators in a variety of interesting and complex chemical and oil spill response cases in 2011.

The PST also participated in numerous preparedness and readiness training exercises across the nation.

Team Summary

Established: March 1973
Location: Novato, Calif.



Calendar year 2011 cases

- Oil - 8
- Hazardous Waste - 11
- Biological - 1
- Natural Disaster - 3
- Other - 8

Total - 31

Exercises and training

- Spilled Oil Recovery System - 8
- Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System - 10
- Preparedness for Response Exercise Program - 3

Total - 21

Chief Petty Officer Todd Taylor with Marine Safety Unit Valdez, Alaska, stands a safety watch near the fishing vessel Sand Island during lightering operations on the sunken landing craft Sound Developer, Nov. 22, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph Herrera.

Top 10 cases of 2011:

Coast Guard support

1. Sector Columbia River requested assistance with salvage removal of the motor vessel Davy Crockett on the Columbia River near Camas, Wash., in January.

2. Sector Guam requested support with a diesel fuel spill in Apra Harbor in January.

3. Sector San Francisco requested tsunami response assistance in Santa Cruz, Calif., in March.

4. Sector San Francisco requested support in Crescent City, Calif., for tsunami response operations in March.

5. Sector Honolulu requested assistance with radiation detection during boardings in Honolulu in March.

6. Sector Puget Sound requested support with assessment of the ferry Kalakala in Tacoma, Wash., in April.

7. Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach requested support with the sunken tank vessel Montebello crude oil pollution threat in Cambria, Calif., in August.

8. The Deployable Operations Group directed National Strike Force support for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in Honolulu in October.

9. Marine Safety Unit Valdez requested assistance with the sunken landing craft Sound Developer in Cordova, Alaska in October.

EPA support

10. EPA Region 8 requested assistance with the ExxonMobil pipeline release in Billings, Mont., in July.

Montebello Re-inspected: Pacific Strike Team revisits history

Story by Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew R. Schofield

The Pacific Strike Team, based in Novato, Calif., was called in August to assist Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach with a beleaguered World War II ship that left a lingering potential of environmental disaster in its wake.

The tank vessel Montebello, loaded with a cargo of more than three million gallons of crude oil, and carrying nearly 105,000 gallons of bunker fuel oil and an unknown quantity of lubricating oil, was torpedoed by a Japanese Imperial Navy submarine and sank in federal waters Dec. 23, 1941. Today, the Montebello sits on the ocean floor approximately two miles south of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and six and a half miles off the coast of Cambria, Calif.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration funded investigations in 1996 and 2003 to assess the Montebello's condition using submersible remotely operated vehicles; each investigation revealed the 70-year-old ship's hull was remarkably intact. This suggested the vessel might still contain all its crude oil cargo and bunker fuel.

In September, the Coast Guard awarded a new contract to Global Diving and Salvage to conduct dive operations to determine how much oil, if any, the Montebello still contained. A unified command comprised of Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach and the California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response requested the PST to provide contractor oversight and oil spill response expertise during operations.

"We wanted ... the strike team to come in, and make sure that they helped us move in that direction of 'getting it right,'" said Coast Guard Capt. Roger Laferriere, the Federal On-Scene Coordinator.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Karl Siegmund was one of four PST members who deployed. He said the PST's previous experience working with the contractor was crucial to the efficient relay of plans and information between the command post and the research ship Nanuq, from which dive operations were being conducted offshore.

"If something were to happen, we were there, ready to set those actions in place in terms of containment if product were to come out of the tanks," said Siegmund.

PST members monitored the contractor's operations as they drilled, and took water, sediment, and tank samples, looking for remnants of oil. Dive operations concluded after about 11 days and revealed the Montebello posed no substantial threat to the waters and shorelines of California.

"My goal was to make sure that we did it in a way that we could document it, and provide it to the next sector or the next Coast Guard unit that wants to look at possibly salvaging, or doing oil assessment on another sunken wreck," said Laferriere. "That is why we had the strike team there. They brought in some great expertise, and they helped us with the technical review."

Members of the PST are hoisted onto the research vessel Nanuq on a personnel transfer net, Oct. 21, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Daniell Lashbrook.

Members of the unified command attend a briefing at the incident command post for the tank vessel Montebello, Oct. 12, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Cory Mendenhall.

The Nanuq, a 301-foot oil spill response vessel that has been outfitted to deploy an underwater remotely operated vehicle, sits six and a half miles off the coast of Cambria, Calif. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Cory Mendenhall.

Global Diving & Salvage technicians navigate the ROV around the sunken World War II tank vessel Montebello, Oct. 12, 2011. NOAA photo by Robert Schwemmer.

Davy Crockett

A rusty river remnant

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric Chandler and Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield
Photos by Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric Chandler

When the 431-foot flat-deck barge Davy Crockett, a repurposed 1940s Navy liberty ship, was found leaking a cocktail of bunker fuel and other harmful substances into the Columbia River near Camas, Wash., in January, National Strike Force members were some of the experts the unified command, which was comprised of officials from the Coast Guard and the states of Washington and Oregon, requested to assist in cleaning up the oil and removing the barge's unstable shell.

"Due to the owner's attempt to scrap the barge in the Columbia River, we were left with a barge whose keel was broken and whose inner tanks were open to the Columbia River," said Coast Guard Capt. Daniel LeBlanc, commander of Marine Safety Unit Portland and Federal On-Scene Coordinator of the Davy Crockett Unified Response.

LeBlanc said so much steel had been removed from the aging barge's hull that, in addition to the environmental hazard, the process of salvaging the barge presented an extreme danger for workers.

Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Shannon, a marine science technician from the Pacific Strike Team, stands safety watch over the 431-foot flat deck barge Davy Crockett during disassembly operations on the Columbia River, June 8, 2011.

The barge Davy Crockett sits enclosed by a cofferdam in the Columbia River near Camas, Wash., April 18, 2011. The cofferdam holds pollutants as crews work to dismantle the barge and remove it from the river. Photo provided by Davy Crockett Response Unified Command.

"We were very uneasy putting workers inside of the midsection to collect the oil and other contaminants, so we looked for expert help," said LeBlanc. "We called the NSF at that point, and the Coast Guard SERT (Salvage Engineering Response Team) team safety center, to come in and give us a look, and give us some advice on the best method to start our response."

Coast Guard and civilian safety observers maintained a presence throughout the operation. Civilian contractors were employed to construct a cofferdam as well as to conduct the dismantling work, which required a crew of very diverse specialists.

"We had other members from the strike force assisting us with some booming strategies, which we had already implemented from our contingency plan," said LeBlanc. "We were just looking for their [NSF] expertise on deciding, based on the type of oil we were dealing with -- a pretty horribly weathered bunker oil -- whether or not we were employing the best methods."

The barge was disassembled stern first, frame by frame. That posed potential problems with oil that was inside, but having the booming strategies in place assured that any oil that could potentially escape could be contained and cleaned up.

Over the course of the eight-month operation, workers removed 3.5 million pounds of steel, 1.6 million gallons of oily water, and nearly 40,000 gallons of bunker fuel. Additionally, more than 4,850 pounds of asbestos were removed.

Petty Officer 1st Class Luke Potter maintains a safety watch during cleanup operations aboard the barge Davy Crockett, Feb. 10, 2011.

Flooded river, spilled oil
NO MATCH FOR THE NSF


SCAT members conduct a safety brief before the day's operations begin, July 16, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Jason Tyger.

Story by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski

Members from the National Strike Force deployed to Laurel, Mont., July 3, 2011, after more than 42,000 gallons of crude oil spilled into the Yellowstone River from a rupture in Exxon's Silvertip Pipeline. Deep, fast moving floodwaters spread the spill along more than 30 miles of the longest undammed river in the United States.

NSF members from the Pacific, Gulf and Atlantic strike teams rotated through the incident command post for 70 days to assist Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 with shoreline cleanup assessment and contractor oversight.

Building a team comprised of responders from all the NSF teams is nothing new, said Lt. Cmdr. Tedd Hutley, the NSF's operations officer. Sometimes, the technical demands of a case, or a team's caseload, might dictate that a combined team is the best way to build a response team.

"Standardization is the key in the oil spill response industry, and all of our team members are trained to the same standards," said Hutley. "That being said, many of our people have extensive training or experience in one particular specialty or another, so our ability to quickly assemble the best team from all the strike teams is a distinct advantage."

Hutley added that sharing resources among the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific strike teams allows members to get trained in types of responses that might be unusual for their area of responsibility.

"Cross training keeps us on our toes," said Hutley. "A lot of our members do multiple tours of duty with the NSF, so all that knowledge doesn't get lost. In the long run, it means we can provide better service to our customers."

Steven Merritt, the EPA's On-Scene Coordinator for the spill, said they needed the NSF's skill and experience to help oversee such a large and complex response.

"We had more than a thousand contractors working in remote areas near a river in flood stage and there was a major concern that we do things safely," Merritt said. "The expertise the NSF brought to the spill was great. They are well versed in spill response, trained to assist on every job we threw at them, and versatile."

Exxon spent millions of dollars cleaning the spill that coated the shores and private property along the river, leaving flood debris and logjams as the waters receded. Contractors removed or burned piles of oiled debris as part of the cleanup. Chief Petty Officer Jason Tyger, a response supervisor with the Gulf Strike Team, said specialized equipment allowed access to hard-to-reach areas.

"The flood waters pushed the oil and oily debris into areas we needed amphibious vehicles and airboats to access it," said Tyger.

The floodwaters and river current also pushed boom and cleanup materials out of place, further complicating the cleanup. Chief Petty Officer Alan Dooley, a response supervisor with the Pacific Strike Team, said the NSF's expertise assisted the contractors in repairing the damage.

"Boom had been pushed parallel to the shore, letting the oil pass by," said Dooley. "Our [Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Team] identified better areas and ways for boom to be placed effectively."

Merritt said that although the Coast Guard's presence might seem unusual in the mountains and plains of the U.S., he wouldn't hesitate to call on the NSF again.

"They were training the trainers and keeping the OSROs (Oil Spill Response Organizations) effective," said Merritt. "There are a handful of people that understand responding to a spill in that environment. The NSF helped with their technical expertise."


Chief Petty Officer Jason Tyger with the Gulf Strike Team takes a water sample during the Exxon Silvertip Pipeline Spill near Laurel, Mont., July 10, 2011.


A strike team member monitors cleanup efforts at the Exxon Silvertip Pipeline Spill near Laurel, Mont., July 8, 2011.

Public Information Assist Team

National Strike Force

About:

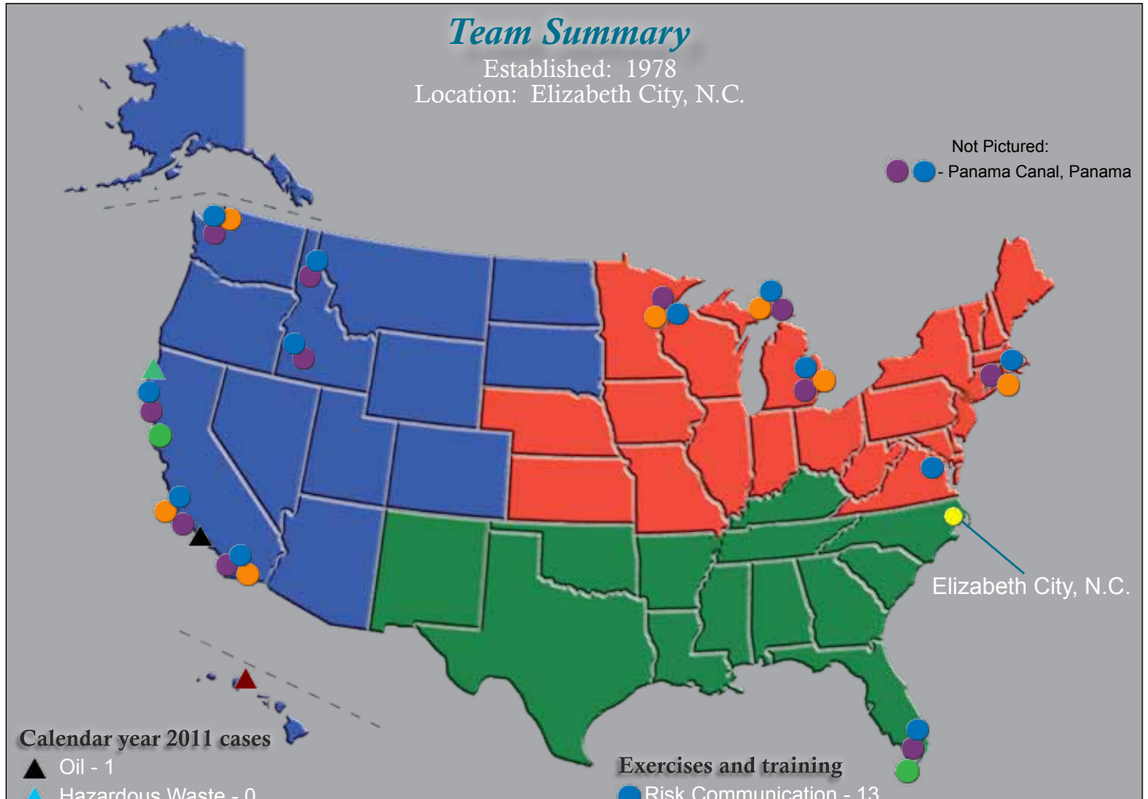
The Public Information Assist Team consists of four highly trained professionals who specialize in risk communication and joint information center operations during oil and hazardous substance releases and natural disasters. The PIAT is co-located with the National Strike Force Coordination Center in Elizabeth City, N.C.

The PIAT's primary mission is to provide unique, interagency environmental response communication expertise to assist incident commanders and Federal On-Scene Coordinators in meeting their objectives of truth and transparency of operations for the public.

When not traveling to incident responses throughout all Coast Guard districts and Environmental Protection Agency regions, the PIAT provides joint information center and risk communication training to the nationwide response community.

Team Summary

Established: 1978
Location: Elizabeth City, N.C.



Chief Warrant Officer Amy Midgett provides coaching to role players in the JIC during Operation Down Under in Duluth, Minn., Aug. 24, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class George Degener.

Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield provides photo training to the Pacific Strike Team in Novato, Calif., Nov., 20, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young takes photos of a skimming demonstration in Oceanside, Calif., May 10, 2011. U.S. Navy photo.

Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski listens during a morning operations brief in Crescent City, Calif., March 22, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaclyn Young works in the JIC for the Crescent City Tsunami Response, March 21, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

2011 deployment highlights:

Coast Guard responses

1. Sector San Francisco requested assistance with media and community relations after a tsunami hit Crescent City, Calif., in March.

2. Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach requested support with the sunken tank vessel Montebello crude oil pollution threat in Cambria, Calif., in August.

3. Sector Honolulu requested assistance with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Honolulu in November.

Training and exercise support

4. The Idaho Soutwest District Health Department requested training for 37 people in Boise and Coeur D'Alene, Idaho in February.

5. Group Humboldt Bay requested training for 34 people in McKinleyville, Calif., in March.

6. District 7 requested training for 36 people in Miami in March.

7. District 13 requested training for 30 people in Seattle, Wash., in April, and exercise support in June.

8. Sector San Diego requested training for 28 people in April, and exercise support in May.

9. The Panama Canal Authority requested training for 40 people in Panama City, Panama in June.

10. Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach requested training and exercise support for approximately 30 people in September.

After the storm

THE PIAT HEADS TO THE WEST COAST AFTER TSUNAMI HITS SEASIDE COMMUNITY

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS JACLYN YOUNG

The destroyed harbor undergoes cleanup operations, March 26, 2011.

A tsunami caused by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Japan struck the coastal community of Crescent City, Calif., and other areas along the West Coast March 11, 2011. The tsunami sent an eight-foot swell into the Crescent City Harbor Inner Boat Basin, sinking 16 vessels and damaging more than 45, after ripping them and the pilings from the docks.

Coast Guard Sector San Francisco requested the Public Information Assist Team to provide crisis communication support and public information duties to the local community on behalf of the established unified command. The unified command's primary goal was to complete pollution mitigation as quickly and safely as possible so that the city of Crescent City could begin restoring its harbor.

"We called the strike team because we wanted continuity," said Jim Pitkin. Pitkin was the contingency and exercise planner and area committee coordinator for Sector San Francisco at the time. He filled numerous roles during the response, including planning section chief. "The PIAT specializes in talking to the community, and they are used to deploying for long durations, so that is an aspect that the sectors appreciate."

Just days after the tsunami hit, more than 100 residents and fishermen attended a town hall meeting; they came to offer their assistance and voice their concerns.

The tsunami had essentially shut down the city's fishing industry, which was the largest Dungeness crab exporter on the West Coast. The Dungeness crab was in season at the time of the tsunami, and the local residents worried about the negative financial impact to the community. Fishermen were also concerned about their damaged boats and the salvage and claims processes.

The PIAT used several different communication methods to address the community's questions and concerns. The PIAT worked with the unified command, Coast Guard Auxiliary and local volunteers to distribute informational flyers around the area, participate in community meetings, and talk one-on-one with residents.

"Getting people on our side with the town hall meetings and flyers that the PIAT participated in was a huge success for our response," said Pitkin. "Once the PIAT showed up, they helped the unified command establish a more positive relationship between the responders and local residents, which made the response better as a whole."

Contractors with the Crescent City Tsunami Response work during high tide to remove debris from the city's inner harbor during cleanup operations, March 18, 2011.

Tony Bettencourt, of Wild Planet Food Inc., displays crab from one of the first catches to come into harbor since the tsunami, March 21, 2011.

(Left) Petty Officer 1st Class Andrew Islas with the Pacific Strike Team and Petty Officer 2nd Class Lydia Teal with Sector San Francisco supervise lifting operations, March 21, 2011.

A diver hooks chain around the keel of a sunken vessel in the harbor in preparation to lift the vessel out of the water with inflatable float bags, March 15, 2011.

Strike Teamers Hit Hawaii Full Force

Story & photos by Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield

The National Strike Force is known for its ability to respond to oil spills and other environmental accidents at a moment's notice, but what is less known, perhaps, is the NSF's readiness to lend its expertise in helping to protect the world's leaders from potential terrorist threats.

The NSF did just that when 17 members from its Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific strike teams deployed to Honolulu Nov. 2-19 for the 2011 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, a meeting of high-ranking officials, numerous heads-of-state including President Obama, and other dignitaries to discuss economic conditions and forge new ways to improve trade among the nations in the region.

Designated a National Security Special Event and organized by the U.S. Secret Service, officials had to plan for every possible terrorist scenario including the release of a chemical, biological, radiological, or neurological agent into the environment. Coast Guard Sector Honolulu requested the NSF's expertise to provide air monitoring and hazardous materials cleanup in a hot zone, or contaminated zone, should any incident occur.

"The likelihood of something happening here was certainly elevated … the eyes of the world were on this event, so in response to potential media issues we asked for the PIAT," said Lt. Blair Sweigart, assistant chief of incident management at Coast Guard Sector Honolulu. "And in response to potential chemical, biological, radiation or nuclear type incidents, we asked for the expertise that came with the national strike teams."

The NSF is no stranger to hazardous situations. Since its establishment in 1973, strike team members have deployed for multiple National Security Special Events such as Super Bowls, G-20 Summits, and national political conventions.

"Any large-scale, major event that there is, or possible threat of a terrorist attack, we are normally in the background somewhere," said Chief Warrant Officer Shane Barrington, a member of the Pacific Strike Team, and the team's response officer during APEC. "Our training and experience prepares us for all types of hazardous situations. We can respond to any unknown hazardous material incident."

Before deploying to Honolulu, the strike teams loaded semi-truck sized containers filled with gear on a C-5 cargo plane: detection instruments, secure communication gear, decontamination and personal protective equipment all ensured the teams remained safe if they had to enter a contaminated area.

The plans for APEC were in the works for more than a year. In addition to the Secret Service and the Coast Guard, the F.B.I., the Hawaiian Lifeguards, Hawaiian policemen and firemen, and numerous civic and non-governmental organizations worked to keep the event from negatively impacting the people of Hawaii and the APEC participants.

Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Zanetti with the Gulf Strike Team sets up the AreaRae network, which checks for multiple gases and hazardous substances, for a training session at Coast Guard Sector Honolulu as part of the APEC, Nov. 8, 2011.

An aircrew at Coast Guard Air Station Barber's Point gives NSF members a safety brief prior to embarking on an HH-65C Dolphin helicopter for area familiarization, Nov. 11, 2011.

Petty Officer 1st Class Truman Skang with the PST replaces the sensors inside the AreaRae detector, Nov. 8, 2011.

Members of the NSF set up a decontamination area during a drill at Coast Guard Sector Honolulu, Nov. 11, 2011.

Final Look

Photo Credits

Coast Guard pollution responders from the Marine Safety Detachment Humboldt Bay and the Pacific Srike Team deploy and work with a Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System aboard the research vessel Coral Sea, June 21, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Seaman Erika Lindquist.

On the cover (thumbnails from left):
An aircrew at Coast Guard Air Station Barber's Point gives National Strike Force members a safety brief prior to boarding an HH-65C Dolphin helicopter for area familiarization, Nov. 11, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield.

Petty Officer 1st Class James Rogers assists Petty Officer 2nd Class Austin West into level B dress during an exercise with PST, Feb. 16, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

Chief Petty Officer Alan Dooley with the PST takes a water sample during the Exxon Silvertip Pipeline Spill near Laurel, Mont., July 10, U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Opposite page (clockwise from left):
Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Shannon is decontaminated by Petty Officer 1st Class Andrew Islas during the PST's annual Readiness for Operations inspection, Feb. 16, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski

Lt. Brownie Kuk of the National Strike Force Coordination Center inspects a re-breather during the PST's Readiness for Operations inspection, Feb. 14, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski.

Petty Officer 1st Class Seth Hartmann of the Atlantic Strike Team conducts a flammability test on an unknown sample, Nov. 29, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Edward Primeau.

Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Schofield of the Public Information Assist Team provides coaching to role players in the joint information center during Operation Down Under, a multi-agency, full-scale exercise in Duluth, Minn., Aug. 24, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class George Degener.

Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Zanetti with the Gulf Strike Team conducts equipment training at the GST in Mobile, Ala., Feb. 11, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

On the Back: Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Shannon of the PST takes a sample of simulated spilled hazardous material during an exercise, Feb. 16, 2011. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Paul Roszkowski

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