

# DEC makes improvements to spill drill program



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The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation has announced improvements to its program for the oversight of oil spill response drills and has published a new manual for planning, conducting and evaluating oil spill response exercises. DEC requires entities that handle oil to maintain approved oil spill prevention and contingency plans, and to conduct regular exercises to test the plans. The exercises are intended to ensure the effectiveness of the plans and to demonstrate the response capabilities of oil facility operators and other organizations involved in spill response procedures.

“Our spill numbers from regulated facilities have been on a decline and that is a testament to the dedication of the oil industry to reduce spills. Exercises are the best way to ensure the oil industry maintains that capacity,” said Kristin Ryan, DEC spill prevention and response director, when announcing the program changes. “Over the last few years, we have worked to improve our program to better ensure the response community is able to prevent, prepare for, and respond to spills.”

Improvements to the exercise program included clarification of the state’s oil spill exercise requirements and of DEC’s role in exercises, both as a partner in the spill response activities and as an evaluator of what is being done. The new procedures better align the requirements of the state and federal agencies, thus removing some redundancies and improving efficiency. Guidance on the design of drills and exercises is now more reflective of realistic incidents while also preparing response teams to deal with the unexpected, DEC says.

And the revised program provides consistency between Alaska and other areas of the United States by incorporating the Federal Emergency Management Administration’s response exercise methodology, based on national and international best practices, DEC says.

“We worked closely with the response community and reviewed guidance from the Department of Homeland Security before making changes to the Oil Spill Response Exercise Program,” Ryan said. “With the recent updates, we believe that the program provides a number of benefits over the previous version, including increasing the value of response exercises, making them more cost effective, and improving the community’s level of response readiness.”

- ALAN BAILEY