

Shoreline Response Programme (SRP) and SCAT-OPS Liaison: The Foundations for a Successful Shoreline Response

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The scale, complexity, and challenges of the shoreline response to the Deepwater Horizon accident were extraordinary – experienced only once before in this way, during the Prince William Sound oil spill some 30 years earlier. To meet the challenges, there was a clear forwards-looking strategy and an integrated program of response activities across the incident command and field teams spanning tens of thousands of people and several thousands of miles of shoreline – all underpinned by a consistent technical foundation and strong stakeholder engagement.

Since 1989, different aspects of shoreline response, including the Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Technique (SCAT) process, had been advanced but it was only during this particular event in 2010 that a formal Shoreline Response Program (SRP) was established, with all components of activity being managed and coordinated robustly, effectively, and efficiently within the well-recognized Incident Command System (ICS). In particular, the need to initiate a SRP with a SCAT component at the outset of a response or as soon as the threat of shoreline oiling is recognized is a critical factor in “Getting it Right from the Start”. Not implementing an SRP at the very outset of a spill response, when typically, the best opportunities exist for the removal of bulk oil, can have significant long-term consequences. Shifting an emphasis on management and physical resources from, often only partially successful, on-water activities to onshore shoreline activities when oil can be picked up more rapidly and effectively can significantly reduce i) the footprint of the response, ii) the duration and scale of the shoreline operation, iii) the exposure of shore zone resources to the oil, and so accelerate environmental recovery, and iv) waste generation.

Among the many challenges, one new aspect emerged in 2010, on maintaining robust coordination and engagement between the decision makers, planners, and core technical advisors in the Command Posts and the field Operations Divisions (OPS) implementing cleanup in the response theatre. A new functional activity was introduced to bridge this gap - SCAT-OPS Liaison. This term perfectly describes the two-way function - to maintain controlled direction, while learning from field operations and validating adjustments to the strategy and tactics. Currently, no mechanism is in place in the ICS structure for the Environment Unit to provide direct and formal support for Operations shoreline cleanup Task Forces/Strike Teams in the field: this support can be provided from the SRP team through SCAT Team Leads or the SCAT-OPS Liaison function (though often this support exists informally). The SRP process enables a formal liaison with Operations in the field to ensure that the ICS driven objectives embedded in the SRP Plans, the Good Management Practices (GMPs), and any environmental or safety constraints in a Shoreline Treatment Recommendation (STR) report – the basic shoreline treatment “work order”

- are understood and implemented. This is a vital bridge between the Command Post (SRP/SCAT) and Operations, and which provides a mechanism for direct feedback from the field to the Spill Management Team (SMT).

In effect the SCAT-OPS Liaison function has two complementary perspectives that ensure alignment between the intent of an STR and the Operations activities that implement that STR.

The Operations perspective	The SRP/SCAT perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluates the reality of the activities that are taking place to achieve the STR requirements • Provides advice on the equipment and resources required for the job • Helps to address any concerns and overcome any operational challenges on-site • Ensures that staging areas are properly set up and operating correctly within the GMPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that the intent behind the STR is understood • Ensures that any constraints and GMPs are understood and respected • Ensures that the outcomes of what need to be achieved in the STR (treatment completion criteria) are understood • Provides sustained support to Operations teams as they work at different sites

Most oil spill events are much more modest, but the lessons and principles presented here are essential for any shoreline response - with a Shoreline Response Program being a strategic part of spill management and the SCAT-OPS Liaison function being vital to successful field implementation. On a recent (2022) response to a coastal oil spill in Perú the SCAT program was part of the Environment Section, and the SCAT-OPS Liaison function was in the Operations Section: two separate teams who closely cooperated with a common purpose which demonstrated the importance and value of this relationship. SCAT-OPS Liaison is something that we have been doing in practice for years but identifying this activity as a specific formal assignment and giving it a name within the ICS recognizes the importance of this relationship between SCAT and Operations.

Initiating an SRP with SCAT and SCAT-OPS Liaison. An SRP can elevate the significance and importance of shoreline response when included in training, drills, and exercises so that an SRP is part of that initial response rather than evolving during the transition from on-water to onshore operations. Shoreline response typically is not a point of focus in an exercise or drill and is rarely part of a preparedness training program; although SCAT training is common, this is only one element of an SRP. The inclusion of the concept of an SRP as a functional cell within the EU in drills, exercises, and preparedness training, as well as in the first set of response objectives, can directly improve the ability to respond quickly and effectively during the initial response phase, which can have long-term significant environmental and operational consequences.

The combination of “Getting it Right from the Start” by immediately establishing an SRP with a SCAT component and by providing a SCAT-OPS Liaison function will set the stage to enable a successful shoreline response.