

Volunteers and unskilled mass labour management: An OSRO's view

Daniela Barreras-Biesot
Oil Spill Response Limited
danielabarreras@oilspillresponse.com

Aaron Montgomery
Oil Spill Response Limited
aaronmontgomery@oilspillresponse.com

Nathan Young
*Australian Marine
Oil Spill Centre*
nyoung@amosc.com.au

Introduction

Volunteers, as individuals who are willing to contribute their time or services in order to achieve an objective beyond the confines of their normal responsibilities and paid employment (Cedre et al., 2011); and unskilled mass labour, as workers who might be paid but have no specific skills related with the needs of the emergency situation; have been used in spill response for many years. It is no shock that the higher profile the incident and the more media coverage it gathers, the greater the turnout of volunteers (professional or un-skilled). There are many advantages to using volunteers in the response to oil spills, they provide local knowledge, may be available in large numbers and often come with enthusiasm and motivation. However, the poor management of volunteers through delayed engagement, inadequate logistical support, poor training or legislative non-compliance can cause additional negative public and political perception for the responsible party or government involved in coordinating the response.

This short paper distils the information provided in the IPIECA Good Practice Guide for Volunteer management, the CEDRE Operational Guide on Management of Volunteers in Coastal Pollution Response and the POSOW Oil Spill Volunteer Management Manual. It also draws upon the experience and case studies from the perspective of an international OSRO and provides a practical view to meeting many of these challenges.

Main Results

Logistical Challenge

The level of logistical organization of volunteers will be linked to the number of volunteers mobilised, depending of the spill size; and the main features of the incident location (amount of resources, facilities and services available in the area, accessibility to response sites, country's organizational structure, etc.).

An organized provision of regular transportation system to and from volunteers' worksites to avoid traffic, parking and cross contamination problems is needed. Location of the spill sites and number of volunteers and their accommodation will determine the type of transport needed which might include local public transport companies, private coaches or even private cars.

Accommodation options will vary depending on the number of volunteers, spill location, weather conditions, season, facilities and services available. Considering the logistical workload, one can find three different options (POSOW, 2013):

- Local accommodation for local volunteers: this would be the easier option from a logistical point of view as no accommodation and probably no requirements for subsistence either will be needed if the volunteers are local.
- Local tourist accommodation: no logistical complexity as no set up is needed and most of the additional requirements (e.g. sanitation, catering) could also be provided.
- Public facilities: medium logistical complexity as some of the basic needs (e.g. shelter, toilets and showers) might be provided. Option able to host from 100 up to 200 volunteers per building.
- Tent cities: although they are quick to set up and can accommodate high volumes of volunteer (between 100 and 350) the management and requirements are a bit more intricate: provision of sufficient beds, kitchen and canteen facilities to serve daily meals, toilets (about 1 for every 20 volunteers), showers (approximately 1 for every 40 guests), heaters or air-conditioning depending on weather conditions, water, light and electrical supplies, fire prevention systems.

All to be managed by a large team (estimated 1 member of staff for every 5 volunteers) in charge of the setting up and its maintenance, taking care of volunteers, cleaning, waste management, food supply, volunteer registers, security, etc.

Subsistence is a basic requirement to keep all the volunteer support running as large efforts may be given every day. Food and drinks will be provided and a whole structure will need to be organized around it:

- provisioned by catering companies, on-site cooking, lunch bags, preparation from local population/restaurants. Consideration will need to be given to individual dietary requirements, which will add an additional level of complexity;
- additional food supplies may be needed in the local area to keep up with the temporary increase of population;
- dedicated personnel are required not only to prepare or cook meals but also to stock, serve, distribute to worksites and clean up;
- means to serve all food must not be forgotten (plates and cutlery, take away bags, boxes, pots and pans, distribution vehicles, etc.).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be one of the limiting factors to keep volunteers on the ground. The correct type of PPE (depending on clean-up operations, oil type, weather, regulations) and the sufficient quantities will need to be provided and distributed.

Once on the ground, worksites will need to be set up with some basic support facilities like decontamination areas, toilets, shelter and rest areas, first-aid post with medical personnel, training facilities. Volunteers involved in clean-up operations will need to be provided with the appropriate equipment (shovels, rakes, buckets).

Additional support services will need to be considered such as overall security, additional local health care services, laundry services, manual labour for temporary constructions, drivers and vehicles/trucks to transport and distribute equipment, medical trainers and professional psychosocial support, support or information points, registering offices.

Adequate and effective training

Prior to any volunteers working on the spill site they should be trained. The type and level of training will be dictated by the work identified for them to complete but there will be many aspects that will be common to all.

Effective training requires technically competent trainers applying established educational principles so as to ensure the volunteers have maximum opportunity for knowledge retention and in turn application. The implementation of a training programme can be illustrated using the training cycle (Shown right - IPIECA, 2014)



Applying this thorough and effective approach to training takes time. It is therefore recommended that training is broken down into 2 phases:

- Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) that can be developed prior to an incident
- Incident specific and role specific requirements

Generic elements volunteers should be trained on include the following:

- health and safety information and protocols, including hazards, mitigations and consequences
- instruction on the correct use of PPE

This first phase can be delivered via e-learning prior to volunteers arriving on in a classroom setting near the incident site.

The second phase of training is the incident specific and role specific requirements these include (POSOW, 2013):

- an overview of the incident and its impacts
- the organization structure and its applicability to the volunteer workforce
- daily registration procedure, rest breaks, food and drink availability
- roles and tasks assigned to the volunteer workforce, and how to carry them out safely and effectively
- any environmental or cultural considerations for the work area/s.

This second phase is best delivered as a balance of classroom and controlled in field training at one dedicated in-field area. From here, once the volunteers are deemed competent in a controlled setting they can be re-tasked into the field with less intense supervision.

Legal and HSE compliance

The entity assuming responsibility for volunteers (government, responsible party or other) may have volunteers sign a release form prepared by a legal advisor. This may or may not prevent legal claims, but should clarify from the outset the expectations of volunteers and management and their awareness hazards in the clean up environment. It will also provide certification that service is given voluntarily without monetary compensation (ITAC, 2006). This release document also provides the platform for inclusion and acknowledgement of any local labour laws or HSE legislation as well as confirmation of their good health with no substantive medical conditions. It is essential that, on the volunteers' register forms, any health details are recorded (medical conditions, medications) as this might limit their operational capabilities and will provide a good health record for any post-event long term health monitoring if required. These documentations can be completed at volunteer registration which should be as early as possible but may be at the same time as any CBT or classroom based learning.

Case studies

Macondo training experiences

The use of an e-learning based compulsory basic training (CBT) during the Macondo incident has gone largely unnoticed. However, with 25,000 volunteers used, this approach of requiring completion of a CBT prior to arrival onsite and then the presentation of a certificate to confirm completion provides a great case study on mass labour management.

Not only did it provide a tool for tracking who had completed training but this approached results in fewer trainers required to cover the basic knowledge. This allows the pool of trainers to focus on tasks with greater practical application which in turn results in greater infield effectiveness.

The length of time some personnel were responding for did highlight a low level of skill fade in some staff. In field guidance was provided in some instances by the role of SCAT Ops Liaison but roving trainers or volunteer liaison officers would be ideally placed to support these individuals.

Prestige's logistical efforts and health issues

The Prestige broke in half on the 19th of November 2002 and, although the exact numbers are not known, some 5000 to 10000 volunteers turned out to work every day during the first two months of the incident (US NRT, 2012), mostly supporting shoreline clean-up operations. The large turnout of volunteers required huge levels of logistical organisation, not always successful. The internet played a significant role in coordination but it was the effort from local administrations and communities the one which really stood out. Sports halls, schools or football fields were converted to accommodate volunteers; and hundreds of restaurants, local individuals and catering companies provided food. Volunteers were given briefings in the morning as well as their PPE kit for the day and then transported by organized buses to working sites which, usually, were not set up with proper support facilities. Although the clean-up operations were deemed a success, many complaints were raised, specially

during the first months, on poor organization and communication, lack of operational supervision and guidance at the working sites and the lack of support from the regional and Spanish government.

Health and safety was a major challenge, the huge numbers of volunteers weren't balanced out with the levels and quantities of protective equipment and tools available, resulting in initial phases of the response with volunteers being highly exposed to the hydrocarbon. After two months of response works, 1,087 volunteers were treated for vomiting, eye and pharynx irritation, respiratory problems and headache related to oil clean-up operations (El Pais, 2003). Other studies show that many volunteers developed respiratory problems within two years of their service. All those cases are just a clear example of the need for volunteers to receive appropriate PPE and training to limit their exposure.

CV Rena and social ownership

The container vessel Rena grounded off the New Zealand coast in October 2011. Despite a strong local and national government response also involving the military, the involvement of volunteers was initiated by the then deputy Prime Minister who strongly advocated the use of volunteers to the incident commander. The timing of this intervention was about 10 days into the incident response. It was also 2 months prior to a national election and served to address the local constituency's concerns at 'not being involved' with cleaning oil off *their beaches*. Within a day, an element was created within the incident management team to provide a hotline and database of all potential volunteers – 8000 plus – was created. Another day was required to create a short induction/training video of about 25 minutes in length. The Operations section then selected suitable individuals with a strong spill response background to conduct the induction/training process and a train-the-trainer program was undertaken.

Within 4 days of the program being initiated, the first 800 volunteers were introduced to manual beach cleaning. The success of the program was realised when 7000 volunteers over a 4-week period were utilised with no personnel injuries reported. Through natural attrition and decreasing amounts of oil on the beaches, the volunteers tailed off over the 4 weeks – however the community involvement and support of the responders (including the local banks hosting BBQ lunches at decontamination sites) highlighted a very important side to any volunteer program; one of involving local communities under their 'social ownership' of the coastal environment in which they live.

Conclusion

Developing an effective structure of volunteer and mass labour management has many complexities. This can result in it being time consuming and manpower intense to manage and plan. There are 2 steps that can therefore be taken to dramatically assist in overcoming these challenges;

- Generic elements that can be planned for prior to an incident occurring should be developed. These include high-level volunteer management and health surveillance plans, document templates, generic training elements
- At an early stage during a response the decision needs to be made as to whether the incident has the potential scale to require volunteers or mass labour management. If so, the high-level plans should be implemented and incident specific requirements to be address at an early stage.

By addressing these 2 steps responsible parties and government alike should be well placed to develop an effective, efficient and successful volunteer and mass labour management programme.

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