

MPA NEWS



Published on *MPA News* (<https://mpanews.openchannels.org>)

Advice for MPA Managers on Oil Spills: Interview with Jim E. Peschel

Jim E. Peschel is an 11-year veteran of the US Coast Guard specializing in pollution response and waterways management, and was the marine operations manager of a national spill-response organization. He now serves as quality assurance manager of a tug and barge company, using training, maintenance, and tools to prevent spills from occurring. Below, Peschel discusses with *MPA News* what MPA managers can do in response to the threat of oil spills.

MPA News: What advice do you have for MPA managers to help them prevent oil spills from occurring near their sites?

Peschel: Work with local trade organizations and major shipping lines to voluntarily keep shipping traffic away from your MPAs. A great example is the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary in the US, which has a voluntary Area to Be Avoided (ATBA) designated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) at the request of the sanctuary. With this designation, vessels voluntarily transit 20-100 miles off the coast, depending on their risk, to minimize the chances of an engine casualty, drift grounding, or collision with another vessel. If an event does occur, this buffer zone allows more time for the response to ramp up, for locals to be notified, and for aggressive clean-up techniques to commence before the oil reaches the MPA. Although only voluntary, any vessels that are tracked going through this area are sent a "reminder" letter from the US Coast Guard and the manager of the marine sanctuary. There is an amazing amount of compliance through the use of this peer pressure.

MPA News: What are the most important steps that MPA managers can take to prepare for a spill emergency, even in cases where funding for response exercises may be very limited?

Peschel: Get to know the players involved with emergency response, and organize governmental organizations, NGOs, volunteer organizations, and big shipping companies BEFORE an event occurs. The best tool during an emergency response is a friendly face. Attend emergency response drills now to meet the players and find out everyone's capabilities.

Large oil-shipping companies are constantly conducting table-top exercises and spill response drills to prepare for unfortunate spill events. If you know a large company that transits your MPA, contact it and let the principals know you would like to get involved. They are always willing to include locals in their contingency planning and will view you as a positive tool in preparing for disaster response.

MPA News: Sometimes there is little a manager can do when a spill happens: the recent Lebanon spill was precipitated by the bombing of a power plant, and a naval blockade prevented a full response to the spill for weeks. If you are an MPA manager whose shoreline is now thoroughly black and oiled, what are your site's chances for recovery?

Peschel: There are a number of spill-response techniques and each one is dependent on the volume of oil spilled, the persistence of the product, and the shoreline type onto which it gathered. The typical methods of clean-up include open water skimming, use of absorbent materials, pressure washing, purposely set fires, chemical dispersants, and physical removal by digging or scraping away the contaminated shoreline. In some cases, actually leaving it alone may be the best response option since the impact of human intervention may be more detrimental to the environment (or dangerous to the responders) than allowing nature to take its course. An example of this would be in muddy marshland, where footprints or heavy equipment may actually drive the oil deeper into the earth, making it harder for the ecosystem to recover. There are naturally occurring organisms in soil and coastal environments that can eat the oil and remediate it over time releasing harmless CO₂ as a by-product. Although it is a very slow process, it does a good job in the long run.

The key is to keep people and wildlife out of these areas if possible until the contamination has been cleaned up and the healthy ecosystem has returned to normal. This may be difficult in highly productive areas like MPAs, where wildlife gather and people may fish (depending on the regulations of the site). The real key is to emphasize prevention and keep the incidents from happening in the first place.

For more information:

Jim E. Peschel, Foss Maritime, 660 West Ewing St, Seattle, Wa 98119, USA. E-mail: JimE@Foss.com

Source URL: <https://mpanews.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/advice-mpa-managers-oil-spills-interview-jim-e-peschel#comment-0>