

**DOCUMENT RESUME**

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**The Coast Guard's Response to Oilspills. March 22, 1978. 8 pp.**

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Appropriations:  
Transportation Subcommittee; by Henry Eschwege, Director,  
Community and Economic Development Div.**

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**Congressional Relevance: Senate Committee on Appropriations:  
Transportation Subcommittee.**

**Authority: Federal Water Pollution Control Act, as amended.**

The Coast Guard reported that oilspills in and around U.S. waters totaled about 14.4 million gallons in 1975 and about 23.1 million gallons in 1976. When an oilspill occurs, the spiller is responsible for cleanup. If the spiller refuses cleanup responsibility, conducts inadequate cleanup action, or is unknown, designated Federal agencies are authorized to initiate cleanup using financing from an oil pollution fund administered by the Coast Guard. Current practice in most offices is to rely on commercial cleanup contractors to contain and clean oilspills. By and large, the Coast Guard has performed its oil pollution containment program in a creditable manner, considering the limited resources available. An analysis of 137 oilspill cases occurring in 1976 indicated that there were opportunities for the Coast Guard to have been more effective in aspects of 38% of the cases. In these cases, the Coast Guard could have been more effective if it had: responded faster to reported spills, better monitored the cleanup operations, taken more effective actions upon arrival at the scene of a spill, attempted to remove minor oilspills before they dissipated in the water, or investigated reported minor oilspills. To obtain increased program effectiveness, the Coast Guard will need to increase its staff, improve training programs, retain experienced personnel, obtain additional equipment, and improve its equipment research and development program and its contingency plans. (RBS)

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY  
EXPECTED WEDNESDAY MORNING  
MARCH 22, 1978

STATEMENT OF  
HENRY ESCHWEGE, DIRECTOR  
COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION  
UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED AGENCIES  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
ON  
THE COAST GUARD'S RESPONSE TO OILSPILLS

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS OUR REVIEW OF THE COAST GUARD'S  
RESPONSE TO OILSPILLS, WHICH WAS UNDERTAKEN AT YOUR REQUEST. I  
WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT OUR WORK IS NOT YET COMPLETED.

THE COAST GUARD REPORTED THAT OILSPILLS IN AND AROUND  
UNITED STATES WATERS TOTALED ABOUT 14.4 MILLION GALLONS IN 1975  
AND ABOUT 23.1 MILLION GALLONS IN 1976.

MY TESTIMONY TODAY WILL ADDRESS THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
COAST GUARD TO RESPOND TO OILSPILLS; OUR EVALUATION OF THE EFFEC-  
TIVENESS OF SUCH RESPONSE ON 137 OF THE OILSPILL CASES WHICH  
OCCURRED IN 1976; AND ACTIONS WHICH, WE BELIEVE, IF IMPLEMENTED,  
WOULD INCREASE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS. THIRTY-SEVEN OF THE OILSPILL  
CASES WERE CLASSIFIED AS MAJOR OR MEDIUM SPILLS (OVER 10,000 GALLONS),

AND THE REST WERE CLASSIFIED AS MINOR SPILLS (UNDER 10,000 GALLONS). WE WERE ASSISTED IN OUR ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR AND MEDIUM OILSPILL CASES BY A PANEL OF EXPERTS.

REQUIREMENTS TO RESPOND  
TO OILSPILLS

THE FEDERAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT, AS AMENDED, AND RELATED REGULATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS REQUIRE THE COAST GUARD TO CONTAIN AND CLEAN UP OILSPILLS IN COASTAL WATERS AND TO RESTORE THE ENVIRONMENT. THEY REQUIRE ALSO THAT THE COAST GUARD PREPARE REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR RESPONDING TO OILSPILLS AND TO PREPARE REPORTS ON EACH FEDERALLY FUNDED OILSPILL CLEANUP FOR OVER 100,000 GALLONS (MAJOR). RECENTLY THE PRESIDENT DIRECTED APPROPRIATE FEDERAL AGENCIES, PARTICULARLY THE COAST GUARD AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, TO IMPROVE THEIR ABILITY TO CONTAIN AND MINIMIZE THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF OILSPILLS. THE GOAL IS AN ABILITY TO RESPOND WITHIN 6 HOURS TO A MAJOR SPILL.

WHEN AN OILSPILL OCCURS, THE SPILLER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CLEANUP. WHEN THE SPILLER REFUSES CLEANUP RESPONSIBILITY, CONDUCTS INADEQUATE CLEANUP ACTION, OR IS UNKNOWN, THE ACT AUTHORIZED DESIGNATED FEDERAL AGENCIES TO INITIATE CLEANUP ACTIONS USING FINANCING FROM AN OIL POLLUTION FUND ADMINISTERED BY THE COAST GUARD.

THE COAST GUARD RESPONDS TO OILSPILLS PRIMARILY WITH PERSONNEL FROM 53 MARINE SAFETY OFFICES LOCATED IN THE 12 COAST GUARD DISTRICTS AND 3 STRIKE FORCE TEAMS. COAST GUARD INSTRUCTIONS STATE THAT THESE OFFICES SHOULD CONSIDER DEPLOYMENT OF

COAST GUARD POLLUTION CONTROL EQUIPMENT WHEN SUCH DEPLOYMENT WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE OR QUICKER THAN OTHER LOCALLY AVAILABLE EQUIPMENT. CURRENT PRACTICE IN MOST OFFICES WE VISITED, HOWEVER, IS TO RELY ON COMMERCIAL CLEANUP CONTRACTORS TO CONTAIN AND CLEAN UP OILSPILLS.

THE COAST GUARD'S STRIKE FORCE TEAMS ON THE GULF, EAST, AND WEST COASTS ARE THE PRIMARY TEAMS FOR RESPONDING TO LARGE OR SIGNIFICANT OILSPILLS. THEY RESPOND TO MARINE SAFETY OFFICE REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE. THEY HAVE EXPERTISE IN SHIP SALVAGE, DIVING, AND REMOVAL TECHNIQUES AND PROVIDE SUPPORT IN SUCH AREAS AS COMMUNICATIONS AND IN ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE FOR CONTAINMENT, CLEANUP, AND OIL DISPOSAL.

EVALUATION OF COAST GUARD RESPONSE  
TO 137 OILSPILL CASES WHICH  
OCCURRED IN 1976

WE FOUND THAT THE COAST GUARD PERSONNEL WHO WORK IN THE OIL POLLUTION ABATEMENT AREA ARE DEDICATED TO KEEPING OUR NATION'S WATER FREE OF OIL POLLUTION AND THAT BY AND LARGE THE COAST GUARD PERFORMED ITS OIL POLLUTION CONTAINMENT PROGRAM IN A CREDITABLE MANNER, CONSIDERING THE LIMITED RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO IT. ON THE BASIS OF OUR ANALYSIS OF 137 CASES, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE WERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COAST GUARD TO HAVE BEEN MORE EFFECTIVE IN ONE OR MORE ASPECTS OF 38 PERCENT OF THE CASES. IN THESE CASES, THE COAST GUARD COULD HAVE BEEN MORE EFFECTIVE IF IT HAD

- RESPONDED FASTER TO REPORTED SPILLS,
- MONITORED BETTER THE CLEANUP OPERATIONS,
- TAKEN MORE EFFECTIVE ACTIONS UPON ARRIVAL AT THE SCENE OF A SPILL,

--ATTEMPTED TO REMOVE MINOR OILSPILLS BEFORE THEY DISSIPATED  
IN THE WATER, OR

--INVESTIGATED REPORTED MINOR OILSPILLS.

ACTION NEEDED TO INCREASE  
PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

TO OBTAIN INCREASED PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, THE COAST GUARD  
WILL NEED TO INCREASE ITS STAFF, IMPROVE TRAINING PROGRAMS, RETAIN  
EXPERIENCED PERSONNEL, OBTAIN ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT, AND IMPROVE ITS  
EQUIPMENT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND ITS CONTINGENCY  
PLANS.

STAFFING AND TRAINING--OFFICIALS OF THE MARINE SAFETY  
OFFICES AND OF HEADQUARTERS ESTIMATED THAT THE COAST GUARD  
ACTIVITIES RELATED TO MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION GENERALLY  
WERE AT LEAST 50 PERCENT UNDERSTAFFED. MANY OF THE QUARTERLY  
REPORTS SUBMITTED SHOWED THAT THE MARINE SAFETY OFFICES DID NOT  
MEET MINIMUM STANDARDS SET BY THE COAST GUARD FOR MISSION  
PERFORMANCE FOR THESE ACTIVITIES. THEY ATTRIBUTED THIS TO  
PERSONNEL SHORTAGES.

ALSO, EXPERIENCED AND TRAINED PERSONNEL ARE NOT BEING RETAINED  
IN THE OIL POLLUTION AREA BUT OFTEN ARE REASSIGNED TO OTHER  
AREAS WHERE THEIR EXPERIENCE IS NOT USED. FOR EXAMPLE, FROM THE  
TIME STRIKE FORCE TEAMS WERE CREATED IN 1973 UNTIL JULY 1, 1977,  
33 PERSONS WERE REASSIGNED; ONLY 5 JOINED A UNIT THAT DEALT WITH  
THE OIL POLLUTION AREA. AT THE TIME OF OUR REVIEW, 56 PEOPLE WERE  
ASSIGNED TO THE STRIKE TEAMS. OFFICIALS OF THE MARINE SAFETY  
OFFICES ALSO SAID THAT THEIR REASSIGNED STAFF OFTEN JOINED UNITS  
THAT DID NOT DEAL WITH THE OIL POLLUTION AREA. THE COAST GUARD HAS

NOT ESTABLISHED A SPECIALIZED JOB CLASSIFICATION FOR MARINE SAFETY OFFICE ACTIVITIES. BECAUSE STAFF PROMOTIONS ARE BASED ON EXPERTISE, PERFORMANCE, AND EXPERIENCE IN AREAS OTHER THAN MARINE SAFETY OFFICE ACTIVITIES, DUTY AT SUCH OFFICES CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO ENHANCEMENT OF A STAFF MEMBER'S COAST GUARD CAREER.

THE TRAINING OF PERSONNEL ALSO NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED. THE 5-WEEK ENLISTED PERSONNEL COURSE AT THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT SYSTEMS SCHOOL DEVOTES ONLY 40 HOURS TO OIL POLLUTION ABATEMENT AND ONLY 1 DAY TO ACTUAL "HANDS ON" TRAINING WITH OILSPILL CLEANUP AND CONTAINMENT EQUIPMENT. IN 5 OF THE COAST GUARD DISTRICTS WE VISITED, ONLY 53 PERCENT OF THE MARINE SAFETY OFFICE PERSONNEL AVAILABLE FOR OIL POLLUTION ABATEMENT RESPONSE HAD COMPLETED THEIR SCHOOLING. MOST MARINE SAFETY OFFICES RELY ON ON-THE-JOB TRAINING FOR ACHIEVING PROFICIENCY BY THEIR PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, EXCEPT FOR THE MARINE SAFETY OFFICE AT HAMPTON ROADS, VIRGINIA, THE OFFICES WE VISITED HAD NOT ESTABLISHED STRUCTURED ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS TO ENSURE A DIVERSITY OF ASSIGNMENTS WHICH WOULD INCLUDE TRAINING IN VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MARINE SAFETY OFFICE DUTIES. THERE IS A NEED FOR STRUCTURED IN-HOUSE TRAINING BY THE MARINE SAFETY OFFICES AND QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED TO ENSURE AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO PERFORM.

COAST GUARD INSTRUCTIONS REQUIRE FOUR DIVERS ON ALL DIVING OPERATIONS. THE GULF STRIKE FORCE TEAM, HOWEVER, HAD ONLY TWO QUALIFIED DIVERS AND ONE SCUBA OUTFIT. THE PACIFIC STRIKE FORCE TEAM HAD FOUR QUALIFIED DIVERS, BUT IT DID NOT HAVE AIR SUPPLIED DIVING EQUIPMENT.

OUR DRAFT REPORT CONTAINS SEVERAL PROPOSALS DESIGNED TO ASSIST THE COAST GUARD IN OVERCOMING ITS STAFFING AND TRAINING PROBLEMS. THESE PROPOSALS ARE CONCERNED WITH IDENTIFYING STAFFING NEEDED AND MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF STRIKE FORCE PERSONNEL; RETAINING EXPERIENCED PERSONNEL BY ESTABLISHING A MARINE SAFETY OFFICE JOB SPECIALITY CLASSIFICATION; AND IMPROVING ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, INCLUDING ESTABLISHMENT OF A STANDARD FOR PERSONNEL QUALIFICATIONS.

EQUIPMENT AND RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT--ALTHOUGH THE MARINE SAFETY OFFICE PERSONNEL GENERALLY HAVE EQUIPMENT TO CONTAIN AND CLEAN UP SMALL OILSPILLS, THEY DO NOT HAVE VEHICLES CAPABLE OF TRANSPORTING BOOM AND CLEANUP EQUIPMENT OR TRAILERABLE BOATS TO DEPLOY SUCH EQUIPMENT. THEY WILL NEED SUCH EQUIPMENT IF THEY ARE TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CONTAINING SMALL OILSPILLS.

THE STRIKE FORCE TEAMS NEED A BETTER VARIETY OF OIL TRANSFER EQUIPMENT, SUCH AS OIL PUMPS; ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION HANDLING EQUIPMENT FOR LOADING AND UNLOADING THE C-130 AIRCRAFT (e.g., HYDRAULIC CRANE AND LARGE CAPACITY FORKLIFT); OIL WASTE RECEPTACLES TO TRANSFER OIL FROM TANKERS (e.g., INFLATABLE OIL STORAGE BAGS); AND COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE OIL SKIMMERS SIMILAR TO ONES THE NAVY USES.

THE COAST GUARD ALSO NEEDS TO IMPROVE THE PROCESS FOR CARRYING OUT ITS OILSPILL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD BE FORMALIZED FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION REGARDING PRIORITY RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS AND EQUIPMENT OPERATING CONSTRAINTS FROM PERSONNEL ENGAGED IN OILSPILL CONTAINMENT AND CLEANUP OPERATIONS, AND FOR PROVIDING APPROPRIATE FEEDBACK TO SUCH PERSONNEL. ALSO, ADDITIONAL EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PLACED ON

ENSURING THE USE OF A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING EQUIPMENT. AS A RESULT OF THE PROCESSES USED IN THE PAST SOME EQUIPMENT THAT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED MAY NOT BE AS USEFUL AS IT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE.

THE COAST GUARD HAS RECOGNIZED A NEED TO ESTABLISH NEW GOALS FOR ITS OIL POLLUTION RESPONSE PROGRAM, INCLUDING EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS. ON JUNE 17, 1977, THE COAST GUARD SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS CENTER--A DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATION PROVIDING RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, AND DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES--TO DETERMINE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, FUTURE COAST GUARD POLLUTION RESPONSE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS. ACCORDING TO THE COAST GUARD, OTHER STUDIES ALSO ARE BEING MADE WHICH RELATE TO DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL EQUIPMENT INVENTORY, VESSEL SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL SYSTEM, SHIPS' CONSTRUCTION AND CREW QUALIFICATION STANDARDS, AND EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES TO BE EFFECTIVE IN ADVERSE WEATHER AND ROUGH SEAS. THE STUDIES BEING UNDERTAKEN BY THE COAST GUARD ARE TIMELY AND ARE URGENTLY NEEDED.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING--THE COAST GUARD HAS PREPARED DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPROVING CONTINGENCY PLANS WHICH, IF PROPERLY IMPLEMENTED, SHOULD CORRECT WEAKNESSES THAT WE NOTED IN THE PLANS. THE INSTRUCTIONS PROVIDE FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN SUCH AREAS AS

--IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC DETAILED COURSE OF ACTIONS FOR PARTICULAR GEOGRAPHIC AREAS WHERE SPILLS ARE MOST LIKELY TO OCCUR,



--PROVIDING CURRENT INFORMATION ON CLEANUP CONTRACTORS'  
CAPABILITIES AND EQUIPMENT,  
--IDENTIFYING ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS, AND  
--STRIVING FOR INCREASED UNIFORMITY AND LESS COMPLEXITY  
IN THE PLANS.

REPORTS ON MAJOR SPILLS--REQUIRED REPORTS ON EACH FEDERALLY  
FUNDED MAJOR OILSPILL CLEANUP WERE NOT ALWAYS PREPARED OR,  
IF PREPARED, WERE NOT ALWAYS DISTRIBUTED TO OTHER COAST GUARD  
PERSONNEL WHO MUST DEAL WITH OILSPILLS THAT MAY HAVE SIMILAR  
CHARACTERISTICS. THESE REPORTS CAN BE VERY USEFUL AS A TRAINING  
DOCUMENT SHOWING LESSONS LEARNED ON PRIOR OILSPILLS.

WE ARE PROPOSING THAT, ON ALL MAJOR OILSPILLS, POLLUTION  
REPORTS BE PREPARED AND DISSEMINATED AND THAT SUCH REPORTS  
CONTAIN DETAILED INFORMATION ON LESSONS LEARNED.

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MR. CHAIRMAN WE WOULD BE GLAD AT THIS POINT TO RESPOND  
TO ANY QUESTIONS YOU OR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE MAY  
HAVE.