

WILDLIFE RESPONSE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPs) DURING OIL SPILL RESPONSE IN ALASKA

Wildlife Response BMPs were developed as measures to reduce impacts to wildlife and their habitats during an oil spill response and for responder safety. These BMPs can be found in Sections 3610 and 9740.3.1 of the Wildlife Protection Guidelines for Oil Spill Response in Alaska (WPG).

These BMPs should be considered general guidance during spill responses. Not all BMPs will be applicable to every response, which is why incident-specific guidance is developed through the ESA section 7 consultation process and the Startup and Comprehensive WRPs. Best available information and professional judgment should be used when determining how to implement these BMPs during each response. BMPs include:

All Response Activities

1. Watch for and avoid collisions with wildlife; report all distressed or dead birds, marine mammals, fish, and other wildlife to Wildlife Branch or supervisor.
2. Ensure work areas are well-lit to minimize inadvertent impacts to wildlife or their habitat.
3. If bears are observed during response activities, contact supervisor, Safety Officer, or Environmental Unit.
4. Responders should follow procedures described in Section 3640.2 of the WPG to report all oiled and unoled carcasses to enable an assessment to determine if the animal may have died from spill-related causes (e.g., inhalation of product fumes or in situ burning, vessel/vehicle strike, or entanglement from gear in the water). These mortalities should be documented and, when possible, carcasses collected or photo documented according to procedures outlined in Section 3640.2.1.1 of the WPG.
5. Work with Operations and Planning Sections to mitigate impacts to subsistence activities from response activities.
6. Avoid transporting or introducing invasive species (e.g., rats).

Land-Based Activities

7. Avoid disturbing vegetation and shorelines with foot traffic, boats, and equipment. Consult wildlife agency representatives in the Wildlife Branch or Environmental Unit if disturbance cannot be avoided.
8. Use existing access and egress areas and roadways.
9. Use low-pressure tire vehicles (e.g., all-terrain vehicles or side-by-side) or consult with wildlife agency representatives in the Wildlife Branch or Environmental Unit to minimize impact.
10. Minimize removal of clean (unoled) sediments.
11. Staging areas and waste collection areas should be examined, and land management agencies (e.g., Alaska Department of Natural Resources) consulted, for the presence of historical properties, cultural resources, and biological resources prior to establishment. Support infrastructure should be located away from sensitive habitats, including shorelines, scrub, riparian habitat, and other vegetated areas.

12. All heavy equipment use should be as low on the beach as possible and avoid the high tide or wrack line while conducting cleanup activities. Keep heavy equipment away from the wrack line unless the wrack line is oiled.
13. Activities that require removal of riparian, forested, scrub, shrub, or other vegetated habitats should be minimized.
14. Waste management should be conducted in a manner that minimizes attracting wildlife (e.g., removing trash daily from work sites). If possible, cut all materials that form closed loops (e.g., plastic packing bands, rubber bands, and all other loops) prior to proper disposal in a closed and secured trash bin.
15. Stakes or flagging that preceded the spill and response activities should not be removed or destroyed.

Aircraft Activities

16. Adhere to incident-specific flight restrictions over sensitive habitats and avoid hovering or landing aircrafts in these areas.
17. Adhere to recommended flight altitude restrictions over wildlife management areas and other conservation units.

On-water Activities

18. If marine mammals or birds become trapped or entangled in boom, anchor lines, or other response equipment, immediately notify wildlife agency representatives for instructions.
19. Install and monitor underwater equipment or booms to prevent entrapment of fish and wildlife.
20. Do not block major egress points in channels, rivers, passes, and bays.
21. Use a properly screened water intake to avoid impacts to fish, especially juvenile or small resident fish. The intake should be centered with a screened enclosure to reduce the potential for fish to be entrained, impinged, or injured. Contact ADF&G for recommendations on screen mesh sizes and minimum water velocity depending on the location and timing of water withdrawal activities.

Additional information on wildlife response considerations, protection measures, and activities relevant to the Operations Section can be found in Section 3600 of the WPG.