

DELAWARE RIVER AND BAY MARINE FIRE FIGHTING TASK FORCE



Overview

The unique and complex issues related to marine fire fighting place heavy demands on planning and response personnel, and their contingency plans. Long before the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) mandated Area Committees, the U.S. Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) and local emergency responders in the Philadelphia area formed the Delaware River and Bay Marine Fire Fighting Task Force (MFFTF) to jointly address these concerns. The Marine Fire Fighting Plan produced by the MFFTF outlines how government resources (federal, state, and local) will coordinate and cooperate to abate a threat to public health and safety stemming from an emergency onboard a ship in port. While the task force is administratively a sub-committee of the Philadelphia Area Committee, it remains a vital and active group with significant responsibility. Some of its key features are:

- USCG / emergency management agencies Joint Plan to address in-port shipboard emergencies;
- Use of “Mutual Aid Agreements” to foster “Unified Ports”; and
- An annual Marine Fire Fighting Seminar for local emergency response teams.

Background

The Delaware River and Bay Marine Fire Fighting Task Force includes 18 counties in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. This area includes the Delaware River and Bay, all major tributaries, as well as the surrounding residential areas, park lands, commercial areas, and recreational boating and industry shipping areas. The task force was created in 1986 to plan for response operations in the areas' waterways, in the event of a fire, explosion, or other such marine disaster. The need for an all-encompassing plan to address fire in ports and on vessels was realized after examining specific incidents where response to shipboard fires was inadequate. The MFFTF fosters partnerships among emergency responders, and coordination with all local agencies to provide effective responses to emergency situations. The coordination provides for better understanding of emergency situations, eliminates jurisdictional concerns, and addresses the question of who provides the monies for resources used.

The MFFTF actively facilitates communication with members, emergency responders, and the public. The committee maintains contact with its members via quarterly meetings, facsimiles, a Marine Safety Office (MSO) newsletter, and a newsletter specifically designed for emergency responders. The MFFTF also sponsors an annual Marine Fire Fighting Seminar.

Coordinated Planning Activities



Planning Committee Profile

The Philadelphia Area Committee has seven standing committees and two ad-hoc committees:

- Standing Committees:
 - ◆ Operations: 11 members
 - ◆ Sensitive Environmental Resources: 14 members
 - ◆ Countermeasures: 15 members
 - ◆ Training and Exercise: 9 members
 - ◆ Communications: 12 members
 - ◆ Marine Fire Fighting: 22 members
 - ◆ Hazardous Materials: 12 members
- Ad-Hoc Committees:
 - ◆ Worst-Case Scenario Development: 10 members
 - ◆ Storage and Disposal: 6 members

Note that many committees have overlapping members.

Organization. All members of the MFFTF have designated responsibilities set by the task force's goals and objectives. These responsibilities define the work of the various sub-committees, and cover the complete base of issues that may arise. Organization in an emergency situation is critical to a successful response. In an emergency situation, the MFFTF calls for the establishment of a command post with key technical advisors (KTAs) and an incident commander who oversees the entire response. KTAs are assembled by the Coast Guard COTP.

Partnering. The MFFTF recognizes that a lone responding agency will lack the resources and trained personnel to adequately handle a marine fire situation. Therefore, the committee, and various local organizations solicit all participants for help and cooperation. The MFFTF fosters good relations between the local fire departments, local industry, and other emergency response units through the use of Mutual Aid Agreements. These agreements identify the manpower, equipment, and materials needed to combat a marine fire. All organizations are strongly encouraged to work together to address different policies. This cooperation promotes the concept of a "Unified Port" approach for response to marine fires. This approach also addresses the issues of resources, and designates each individual's responsibility in an emergency. The MFFTF relies heavily on the continued partnering of the various public and private emergency response organizations to complement and expand the Mutual Aid Agreements.

Training & Exercises

Marine Fire Fighting Seminar. This annual seminar is designed to benefit fire fighters, law enforcement, emergency medical services, emergency response, and elected officials. Its main goal is to familiarize personnel with all aspects of a maritime response. The seminar offers sessions on Awareness, Operations, Technician Training, and Incident Command. These sessions are designed to provide an overview of ships and ship construction, port organization, guidance for the "first in" fire fighting company, and communications. Other sessions include tankship safety, confined space entry, and shipboard fire suppression systems. All seminar sessions are conducted in accordance with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard 1405, Guide for Land-Based Fire Fighters Who Respond to Marine Vessel Fires.

Planning Committee Activities

- MFFTF quarterly meetings
- Annual Plan review and update
- Large team exercises every three years
- Dissemination of suggestions for improved planning coordination by mail to District Offices and MSOs

Training. Although local fire fighters are called upon to fight fires at port facilities, they may be unfamiliar with how to fight a marine fire. Vessel fires require different response tactics from land-

based fires. Currently, shipboard fire fighting training is the exception rather than the norm for typical fire departments. However, the MFFTF has established a marine fire fighting training subcommittee with representatives from all three states. The subcommittee is developing a standard curriculum to be made available to fire fighters. The curriculum will be based on Guide for Land-Based Fire Fighters Who Respond to Marine Vessel Fires. This curriculum will also provide the opportunity to train land-based fire fighters in other disaster related problems, such as hazardous materials response.

Exercises. The MFFTF conducts annual marine fire fighting exercises, unless an actual fire fighting incident occurs. The exercises have multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional involvement, and they require full implementation of the Area Contingency Plan. State coordinators are responsible for arranging and supervising the exercise. These exercises help responders develop expertise, and provide opportunities for planners to evaluate tactics and build upon lessons learned.

Outreach. The Marine Fire Fighting Task Force is a highly regarded organization. Emergency response teams from around the world have expressed interest in using the MFFTF as a model for effective coordination and planning.

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