

CHARLESTON AREA CONTINGENCY PLAN



Overview

With the increase in hazardous materials traffic through Charleston’s environmentally sensitive waters came the need for a comprehensive response plan. With a number of wildlife reserves in the area, the ecological impact of a marine spill could be huge. Generally, Area Committees address environmental protection, while Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) to focus on protecting public health and safety. Because of this difference, and recognizing the importance of close coordination in mounting an effective response, the Charleston Area Contingency Plan relies heavily on coordination and input from the LEPCs within its planning area. While LEPC planning efforts concentrate on the first several hours of an emergency, the Charleston Area Contingency plan focuses on pollution prevention and response. Key features include:

- Bill of Rights for Responsible Parties;
- Addressing hazardous materials and oil; and
- Protection strategies for six wildlife preserves.

Background

The Charleston Area Contingency Plan covers coastal South Carolina from the North Carolina border south to Edisto Island, South Carolina, including all inland water bodies from Highway 17 to the coast and portions of the Intercoastal Waterway. The Area Contingency Plan includes offshore responsibility out to 200 miles. The geographic area covered by this plan contains the commercial ports of Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina, numerous ports for fishing and recreational vessels, and six wildlife reserves. Barge traffic carrying significant volumes of oil or other hazardous materials moves frequently through the Port of Charleston. The need for a plan was emphasized by the increased amount of



Planning Committee Profile

Total Area Committee membership	70 members
Executive Steering Committee	10 members
<i>Working Groups</i>	
• HAZMAT Response	24 members
• Roles and Responsibilities	12 members
• Joint Information Center	7 members
• Endangered Species	3 members
• Natural and Cultural Resource	7 members
• Marine Fire Fighting	12 members
• National Historic Preservation	12 members
• Ad-hoc Committees:	
Worst-Case Scenario Development	10 members
Storage and Disposal	6 members

Note that many committees have overlapping members.

hazardous materials being transported into the Charleston area. The Charleston Area Contingency Plan is designed for use with other response plans within the area. Because of the number of wildlife reserves within the Charleston vicinity and the potential major ecological impact from an incident, the plan focuses mainly on pollution prevention. The ultimate goal is to limit the major ecological damage should an incident occur. The Charleston Area Contingency Plan is a working document designed to prepare not only for a present-day emergency, but to look ahead at future emergencies.

Coordinated Planning Activities

The Charleston Area Committee meets twice a year. It is chaired by the Commanding Officer, Marine Safety Office Charleston, who is also the Federal On Scene Coordinator (FOSC). Membership is open to anyone who wishes to join. The committee uses workgroups that meet individually every two months. These meetings help planners maintain contact with the individual members of the committee and update the plan as needed.

Organization. When an incident occurs, the plan calls for the establishment of a Unified Command Structure (UCS) which includes the FOSC, the State On-Scene Coordinator (SOSC), and the responsible party. The UCS assembles and organizes federal, state, and local agencies, and the responsible party into an incident command system. The UCS provides the organizational guidance for leadership during a response. The Area Contingency Plan establishes interagency communications protocols. It also promotes unity in the response structure, and an orderly line of authority within the UCS.

Communications. An organized communication structure is essential to the success of the Charleston Area Contingency Plan. A directive within the plan calls for the establishment of a communications base to provide a standard communications network for emergency responders. The communications network receives all calls and information regarding a particular emergency, and redirects incoming calls to the proper location. A main function of the communications base is to eliminate extraneous information (not critical or pertinent to the response) that would burden the responders. The communications base has been operationally successful.

Planning Committee Activities

- Workgroups meet once every two months
- Committee as a whole meets twice a year
- Plan is updated yearly
- MSO Charleston responsible for the revision and distribution of the plan
- Committee communicates through meetings and letters

Outreach. The Charleston Area Committee designates a Community Relations Coordinator and Staff to field questions and concerns from the community. The program collects community input and provides needed information, especially during an emergency. During a spill response, the Community Relations Coordinator is responsible for establishing a point of contact for citizens to call and receive information. Information is also disseminated through the *Sea Partners* program, cable access television, visits, and tours. Along with a community outreach program, the Charleston Area Contingency Plan has a specific protocol for media relations during a response. The Joint Information Center (JIC), with federal, state, and responsible party representatives, oversees the entire operation to ensure quality control over information released to the public. The lead Public Affairs Officer (PAO) is responsible for handling press conferences and briefings, and handling controversial or sensitive issues with discretion. A general press release format is followed in all instances, and a media guidance brief is used to answer any further questions the media may have.

Training & Exercises

Exercises. The Charleston Area Committee members participate in the National Preparedness for Response Exercise Program (PREP). This comprehensive exercise program has been adopted to fit the Charleston Area Contingency Plan, and is used as a template for all exercises conducted. During exercises, emphasis is placed on communication and on participants learning their specified tasks. Exercises are viewed as key processes in determining weaknesses in the plan. Any lessons learned from exercises are reviewed for possible addition to the plan.

Incident Analysis

Incident. On May 12, 1996, the M/V EVER ROYAL, a 940-foot container ship, was docked at the North Charleston Terminal with a cargo that included 80,000 pounds of cyanuric chloride (UN 2670), a regulated hazardous material. Cyanuric Chloride has the consistency of talc and can cause skin burns due to the formation of hydrochloric acid. During offloading, two containers came free from the gantry crane and fell into the hold of the ship. The containers were damaged and the loose cyanuric chloride was released. Powder filled the air and the bulk of the loose material covered the other containers in the hold.

Response. The local fire department was the initial responding agency. Due to the large amount of airborne cyanuric chloride, the fire department evacuated the crew and secured the area. The U.S. Coast Guard also responded as the FOSC and placed an engineering watch officer on board to monitor the ship's systems. The initial incident was cleaned up within one week. However, it required another two and a half months to completely neutralize the unstable material.

Lesson Learned. Some important lessons came out of the response to the M/V EVER ROYAL. First, the local fire department and the U.S. Coast Guard had some jurisdictional conflicts that affected communications during the early stages of the response. As a result, a more effective liaison between the Area Committee and the LEPC was recommended. Second, the local fire departments did not have a mechanism for including the responsible party in their incident command structure. This frustrated the vessel operator who was attempting to act responsibly throughout the incident. As a result, a Bill of Rights for the responsible party was introduced into the Charleston Area Contingency Plan. This innovative feature gives the responsible party certain rights if it acts in a responsible manner during the incident. In addition, lessons learned from this incident led to the establishment of a communications structure and jurisdictional guidelines using UCS.

Point of Contact



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Timely review of incidents and implementation of the associated lessons learned have proved to be important in the development and refinement of the Charleston Area Contingency Plan.