Interagency members from the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Department of the Interior/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) participating on the National Response Team’s (NRT) National Environmental Compliance (NEC) Subcommittee developed the Response Action Matrix to aid in Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultations.

The goal of the Response Action Matrix is to help build a common understanding between the action agencies (USCG and EPA) and the Services (NMFS and USFWS) of the proposed spill response activities (actions that are authorized, funded, or carried out) and their potential impacts on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat of such species. The matrix attempts to deconstruct the activities in order to more effectively identify and evaluate their potential impacts. The matrix may be used in the development of Biological Assessments/Evaluations to aid in fully describing the proposed actions and facilitating discussions on what and how species or habitat may be affected.

The Response Action Matrix includes:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Column A | The spill response activity (federal action) | These columns describe what the action is and when, where, and how it is used. |
| Column B | The definition of the spill response activity |
| Column C | Typical locations in the action area where the response activity is implemented |
| Column D | Environmental conditions that limit where or when to use the response activity |
| Column E | Discussion questions/considerations | These columns describe actions that are part of the response but not pre-determined in pre-spill planning. |
| Column F | Potential inter-related and inter-dependent response activities |
| Column G | Aspects of spill response activity that are in scope of consultation | These columns describe the specific elements of the action that could affect species and the potential impacts. |
| Column H | Potential impacts considered on ESA-listed species or their habitat |
| Column I | General groups of species that may be affected | This column lists the broad groups of species that may be affected. |

Developed mainly for use in pre-spill ESA Section 7 discussions at the Regional Response Team (RRT) level, the matrix was designed to improve coordination and consistency to better achieve timely, efficient, and effective compliance with the ESA. Action agencies should work with their regional ESA Section 7 personnel from NMFS and USFWS to identify and continue to vet the threatened and endangered species and critical habitat specific to the defined geographic area in consultation. The response activities in the matrix may be modified as necessary, depending on the activities and protocols specific to the region. The matrix may also be used to inform or facilitate emergency ESA Section 7 consultation.