



The Role of the Regional Response Team

The Regional Response Team (RRT) is a key component of the U.S. federal government's commitment to ensure effective preparedness and response to oil and chemical incidents affecting human health and safety, as well as the environment. As described in the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP, 40 CFR part 300), the RRTs are responsible for planning and coordination of regional preparedness, as well as planning and coordination of response actions in support of the Federal On-Scene Coordinator (Federal OSC).

RRTs function in two ways – as a standing team and as an incident-specific team. The roles and responsibilities of the RRTs are described in more detail below and outlined in §300.115 of the NCP.

The Standing RRT

Standing RRTs are planning, policy, and preparedness coordinating bodies. They provide a regional mechanism for the development and coordination of preparedness activities before a response action is taken. There are 13 RRTs: one for each of ten federal regions, plus one each for Alaska, the Caribbean, and Oceania (see map on last page). RRT membership consists of representatives from 16 federal agencies – which are listed to the left and on the National Response Team (NRT) website at www.nrt.org – as well as from state, local, and tribal governments. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) co-chair each standing RRT. States are represented by State Environmental Agencies or emergency management officials. In addition, although non-voting members, representatives from industry, environmental organizations, and civic groups may also make important contributions to RRTs.

Standing RRTs meet regularly at varying locations within their region to develop working relationships, exchange information, and develop regional policies and procedures for response. Meetings provide a forum for adopting policies, considering whether to request and review Federal OSC reports on incidents in the region, and discussing lessons learned from responses. RRTs also typically maintain work groups where representatives focus on specific priority tasks. Through these work groups, RRTs have produced:

- ◆ policies on the potential use of dispersants and *in-situ* burning for spilled oil;
- ◆ region-specific emergency notification and response protocols;
- ◆ shoreline countermeasure manuals to enhance protection and cleanup of oiled habitats;
- ◆ guidelines to protect wildlife; and
- ◆ guides that provide responders with information on the use of various oil spill response technologies.

Regional Preparedness

Under the NCP, planning is divided into several levels: national, regional, area, state, local, and vessel and facility. Each level requires the development of a plan, all of which must be consistent with the NCP and other higher level plans. Each standing RRT is responsible for developing and maintaining a Regional Contingency Plan (RCP). The purpose of the RCP is to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, local, and other responders at an incident site are clearly defined in advance of the incident.

Area Contingency Plans

In the same way that RRTs develop RCPs, Area Committees, composed of federal, state, and local agency representatives, develop Area Contingency Plans (ACPs). The Federal OSC responsible for the area oversees the process and works with the standing RRT and state, local, and tribal representatives throughout the ACP's development. The standing RRT should review the ACP to provide feedback and guidance to Area Committees to ensure: (1) RRT member agencies' resources and issues are addressed appropriately, and (2) inter-area consistency and consistency of individual ACPs with the RCP and the NCP.

As part of their planning process, RRTs and Area Committees identify resources at risk that need to be considered in the event of an incident. In addition, RRTs and Area Committees address the use of appropriate dispersants, surface washing agents, surface collecting agents, bioremediation agents, or miscellaneous oil spill control agents listed on the NCP Product Schedule, and the use of burning agents.

RCPs also outline when an incident-specific RRT should be activated and describe the role of the RRT in supporting the Federal OSC.

The Incident-Specific RRT

While the standing RRT provides the regional mechanism for development and coordination of preparedness activities before a response action is taken, the incident-specific RRT is available for coordination of assistance and advice to the Federal OSC during incident response.

The role of the incident-specific RRT is determined by the specifics of the response. However, key responsibilities of the incident-specific RRT generally include:

- ◆ supporting the Federal OSC;
- ◆ monitoring the response;
- ◆ coordinating on issues of concern that cannot be resolved within the response organization;
- ◆ providing communications support;
- ◆ making recommendations to the Federal OSC consistent with the RRT's expertise;
- ◆ providing advice to the Federal OSC on the use of chemical countermeasures (e.g., dispersants and *in situ* burning), which have not been preapproved for use in the response area; and
- ◆ assisting the Federal OSC in mobilizing resources available from RRT members in the region.

If the assistance requested by a Federal OSC exceeds an RRT's capability, the RRT may request assistance from the NRT.

On incident-specific RRTs, participation by the RRT member agencies will relate to the specific nature of the incident, including its location.

The Unified Command is a structure that brings together the "Incident Commanders" of all major organizations involved in the incident in order to coordinate an effective response. Ideally, consensus will be achieved within the Unified Command. If consensus cannot be reached, the incident-specific RRT can be used by the Federal OSC as a mechanism to provide support and conflict resolution from the leadership of his or her own agency, other federal agencies, and local, state, and tribal governments. If the RRT cannot

provide this support, the Federal OSC retains ultimate decision-making authority.

How Do Regions Use the Incident-Specific RRT?

Some RRTs activate an incident-specific RRT for unusual or hard-to-manage incidents. Other RRTs activate an incident-specific RRT only if there is a problem that cannot be resolved by the Incident or Unified Command or to ensure accurate dissemination of response information to its membership. For the most part, RRTs will generally agree to activate an incident-specific RRT if it is evident that the Federal OSC needs additional consultation, resources, or support.

Examples of Incident-Specific RRT Activations

- ✓ RRT 6 activated by teleconference when the M/V Westchester holed a cargo tank 60 miles south of New Orleans, Louisiana, spilling an estimated 500,000 gallons of crude oil into the Mississippi River. The RRT discussed the use of surface cleaners on vessels in the vicinity of the spill to ensure that the vessels could be cleaned and allowed to leave the contaminated area.
- ✓ RRT 4 activated as a result of a request from the Federal OSC responding to an incident at the Flura Chemical facility in Newport, Tennessee. The Federal OSC requested assistance from the RRT in verifying the magnitude of the threat.
- ✓ RRT 3 activated in response to the derailment of a CSX train in downtown Baltimore, Maryland, to provide information management support and to ensure the Federal OSC's needs were met.

Why and How is an Incident-Specific RRT Activated?

Activation of an incident-specific RRT typically comes at the request of a Federal OSC. One or more RRT members may also request activation of the RRT. One or both of the Co-Chairs of an

RRT may also decide to activate an incident-specific RRT based on the guidelines in the NCP, which state that an RRT can be activated when a discharge or release:

- ◆ exceeds the response capability available to the Federal OSC in the place where it occurs;
- ◆ transects state boundaries;
- ◆ may pose a substantial threat to the public health or welfare of the U.S. or the environment, or to regionally significant amounts of property; or
- ◆ is a worst case discharge as described in the Part 300.124 of the NCP.

When an incident-specific RRT is activated, it may be convened either by telephone or in person. Meetings may be convened at the scene of an incident or at any mutually agreeable location.

More Information. . .

For more information on RRTs, please visit the NRT website at:

WWW.NRT.ORG

Regional Response Teams

