



16451

## MEMORANDUM

From: CAPT J. R. Caplis  
CG-533

Reply to: CG-5332  
Attn of: LCDR Casey

To: DCO  
Thru: CG-5  
CG-53

Subj: SPILL OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE (SONS) EXERCISE AND TRAINING PROGRAM AND 2012-2014 CONCEPT OF EXERCISE

Ref: (a) National Preparedness for Response Exercise Program Guidelines (PREP)

- 1. Issue:** This Decision Memorandum presents a vision for an annual SONS Exercise and Training Program for the foreseeable future. Your approval will realign the SONS Exercise and Training Program to focus on increased involvement of senior agency executives and elected officials, as well as providing targeted discussion of complex and politically-sensitive national-level issues in future SONS exercises.
- 2. Discussion:** Several key Deepwater Horizon lessons learned reports clearly indicated that senior leadership at the national and regional level was not sufficiently aware of or practiced in addressing critical issues that could arise during a SONS. This was despite the fact that the most recent exercise in the triennial SONS exercise cycle was held less than a month before the spill. The logical conclusion then is that part of the problem may lie with the SONS exercise program itself. A chronic problem that has existed with the Program is that senior leaders were largely reluctant to participate. Since 1997, SONS exercises have focused on large scale deployment of personnel and equipment. While senior leaders were invited to participate, exercise design and execution focused on operational issues and tactical command-and-control of forces. The Deepwater Horizon incident clearly demonstrated the need to find ways to bring senior leadership back to the table and engage them frequently in strategic discussions and exercises so that they remain familiar with the concepts and challenges of incident management and response in the national, state, tribal, and local political arenas.
- 3. Intention:** The SONS Exercise and Training Program should be reshaped from the full-scale operational deployment into a progressive series of policy and strategic seminars and tabletops that gradually increase in complexity and intensity of leadership engagement, both in terms of the numbers of entities represented and the seniority of the participants. In the first two years of the cycle, each annual SONS exercise and training evolution would focus on providing targeted discussion of complex and politically-sensitive national-level issues by the most senior leaders of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Coast Guard, and the National Response Team (NRT). In the third year, an expanded tabletop exercise will include Regional Response Team (RRT) participation along with additional Federal, State, Tribal, and local decision-makers as participants (i.e., in FY14 for the current cycle). This revised SONS Exercise and Training Program would provide a forum to strengthen and build relationships, broaden perspectives, and

refine the response capabilities at the most senior levels of government. The SONS Exercise Program would concentrate on the following overarching objectives:

- a. Familiarize agency principals, deputies, senior executives, and policy makers with the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP), the National Response Framework (NRF), the National Response System and SONS response doctrine;
- b. Discuss potential courses of action for current national oil spill response policy issues;
- c. Explore interagency coordination processes and procedures during a SONS.

4. Recommendation: Based on analysis of the current SONS exercise program, redirect the SONS Exercise and Training Program to annual senior-level seminar/tabletop exercises.

APPROVED:



DATE:

2/17/2012

DISAPPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

Enclosure: (1) SONS Exercise and Training Program Issue Paper