

FEDERAL COORDINATION ON ARCTIC SPILL PREPAREDNESS

The Interagency Working Group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska was established by Executive Order 13580 on July 12, 2011. The Working Group is chaired by Deputy Secretary of the Interior David J. Hayes, and includes Deputy-level representatives from federal agencies with responsibilities related to energy permitting, development, and oil spill preparedness and response in and offshore Alaska. Working Group activities include coordination of permitting activities, the synthesis of best available Arctic science, and enhanced outreach and consultation with local and affected Arctic communities, most notably Native Alaskan communities.

The federal government has a well-established structure for coordination and response in the event of an oil spill. A major initiative has been underway in the aftermath of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to strengthen federal coordination and response, and additional work is being planned to address potential exploratory drilling in the summer of 2012. One of the lessons from the *Deepwater Horizon* is that integrated public and private planning and coordination are essential in the event of a spill. Numerous discussions and meetings at the staff and Deputies level within the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), the Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), have helped to evaluate federal preparedness and to identify additional steps to continually improve the level of federal preparedness and federal response capabilities. Response efforts will also be coordinated with the National Response Team (NRT), an interagency group chaired by the EPA and vice-chaired by the Coast Guard.

The federal government is taking steps to ensure its preparedness in the event that drilling activities, which have not yet been permitted, are ultimately approved. BSEE and the Coast Guard will verify that industry oil spill response measures are in place prior to drilling, and if drilling is approved, both agencies will maintain an enhanced presence in the Arctic Ocean during those drilling activities. While Coast Guard operational assets are not, and should not be the first line of defense in the recovery of spilled oil, the Coast Guard plans to have available a flight-deck equipped cutter and a 225-foot buoy tender with some ice capabilities in the region during the summer months. BSEE also would maintain a 24/7 inspector presence on board each rig in the Chukchi and the Beaufort Seas if drilling takes place.

The Alaska Unified Plan as well as local plans for conducting oil spill response operations in the Arctic region are being reviewed and updated in a cooperative effort between the Coast Guard, BSEE, EPA, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and numerous other federal, state, local and native and industry participants. Among other things, those plans identify sensitive ecological resources in the region and outline protection strategies. Approved plans and revisions can be found at: <http://www.akrrt.org/>.

Several exercises have also taken place and more are planned. For the last several summers, the Coast Guard has deployed vessels, aircraft and personnel to North Slope areas to practice operations in the area and work with local officials and citizens. On Dec. 8, 2011, members of the Coast Guard and the State of Alaska conducted an Incident Command Post workshop with Shell personnel to improve oil spill preparedness. BSEE is planning an additional exercise with Shell and federal, state and local representatives in spring 2012. In addition, the Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT), which is made up of 12 federal agencies and the State of Alaska, is beginning preliminary planning for an exercise using the Alaska Unified Plan to exercise ARRT processes for responding to an incident, including a review of ARRT decision making processes for authorizing the use of dispersants. Finally, BSEE will conduct a deployment test of Shell's capping stack prior to the approval of Shell's drilling permit application, as well as on-site unannounced inspections of deployed spill response equipment.