

National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan

Purpose

The purpose of the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan, more commonly known as the National Contingency Plan (NCP), is to facilitate the Federal Government's response to both oil spills and hazardous substance releases in the United States and its territories, and to ensure overall coordination in the event of such spills among the hierarchy of responders and contingency plans.

Basic Plan

The NCP describes the basic mechanisms and structures by which the Federal Government will plan for, prepare for, and respond to oil and hazardous substance releases. The NCP establishes the National Response Team (NRT) to plan and coordinate responses to major discharges of oil and hazardous substances, coordinate a national program of preparedness, planning, and response, and facilitate research to improve response activities. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) serves as the lead agency within the NRT. The plan also establishes Regional Response Teams to coordinate preparedness, planning, and response at the regional level.

The NCP requires that spills of oil and hazardous substances be reported to the National Response Center, the central clearinghouse for all pollution incident reporting. The NCP also authorizes the pre-designated On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) to direct all Federal, state, local, and private response activities at the site of a discharge. The Plan establishes the incident command system for managing responses. Depending on the location of the oil spill, the lead agency will be either the EPA or the U.S. Coast Guard. For hazardous substance releases, the lead agency may either be EPA, U.S. Coast Guard, or the Department of Defense, depending on where the spill originates. In addition, the NCP defines the objectives, authority, and scope of other contingency plans including regional and area contingency plans.

For oil spills, the NCP establishes the national priorities for responding to such spills. Under the plan, the OSC determines whether a spill poses a substantial threat to the public health or welfare, and if so directs all Federal, state, local and private response and recovery actions. The OSC also may enlist the support of other Federal agencies or special teams. In the event of a worst-case discharge, the National Strike Force Coordination Center may assist in coordinating the acquisition of needed response personnel and equipment.

For hazardous substance removals, the NCP authorizes the lead agency or OSC to initiate an appropriate removal or mitigation action. Decisions of action are based on threats to human or animal populations, contamination of drinking water supplies or sensitive ecosystems, high levels of hazardous substances in soils, weather conditions that may cause migration or release of hazardous substances, the threat of fire or

explosion, or other significant factors effecting the health or welfare or the public or the environment.

