



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

Spill Prevention,
Preparedness, and
Response Program

2015-2021

Strategic Plan

*“Our waters, our citizens, ours to
protect.”*

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From the Program Manager

Where do we need to improve the system to help us and the entire spill-response community come closer to our “zero spills goal?” With continued changes in oil types and the modes of oil transportation, there is no better time than now for us to talk about our preferred future and begin the hard work to get there.



**Dale Jensen,
Program Manager**

Over the last decade, and especially in the past three years, significant changes have occurred in how crude oil is transported through the state. Historically, 90 percent of crude oil bound for Washington’s refineries was delivered here by tank ship from Alaska or from other international sources of oil. Today crude oil transportation is rapidly shifting to delivery by rail and pipeline. Crude oil also passes through our rail corridors bound for other coastal states. These shifts were well documented in the [2014 Marine and Rail Oil Transportation Study](#) developed by the Spills Program in 2014-2015.

The properties of oils produced today present new concerns. Canadian bitumen crude oil in various forms raises spill-response challenges – it may weather and sink or submerge in water if spilled, making oil recovery difficult. Bakken crude oil has shown a propensity to catch fire during tank-car derailments, putting public safety at risk. These hazards have come to light through several rail incidents in the United States and Canada, notably in a tragic rail incident in Quebec when 47 people lost their lives as an oil train derailed and burned.

A catastrophic incident is not required to make changes to improve our program. Since 1997 we have looked for ways to prevent oil spills and improve our preparedness and response posture through lessons learned from spills and drills. Washington is a national leader in oil spill prevention, preparedness and response because of our forward-leaning leadership that makes significant, strategic investments. The 2015 Legislature took another significant step forward through passage of the [Oil Transportation Safety Act](#). The improvements that will come from this bill will help address the risk resulting from transporting crude by rail and help our state maintain its status as a national leader. While more must be done for program funding and vessel safety in Puget Sound, the 2015 legislation provides important investments in safety, including:

- Contingency planning requirements for rail.
- Additional geographic response planning.
- Pilotage Commission authority for new vessel safety measures in Grays Harbor.
- Vessel traffic risk assessment for the Columbia River, Puget Sound and Grays Harbor.
- Rail and pipeline reporting requirements for oil movement.
- Equipment cache grants for local governments and first responders.

We have adapted and evolved with changing political and economic situations and we will continue to do so into the future. In an organization as dynamic as oil spill prevention, preparedness and response, we must react and change by implementing lessons learned. We must also lead change. Our current and future success depends on all of us having a shared vision, a commitment to continuous improvement and a mission to protect Washington’s environment, economy and way of life.

Introduction

More than 20 billion gallons of oil and hazardous materials are transported through Washington State each year by ship, pipeline, rail and road. Human error, equipment failure and natural disasters can lead to releases of these materials with potentially disastrous consequences. Oil and chemical spills threaten Washington’s valuable natural resources. Over the years the nature of these threats has changed due to the market and new technological innovations. These threats – whether on land or water – endanger public health, safety and the environment, and can ultimately damage the state’s economy and quality of life.

The Washington Department of Ecology’s Spill Prevention, Preparedness and Response Program’s work is diverse. The program works with communities, industry, state and federal agencies, tribes and other partners to prevent and prepare for oil spills. The program also responds to oil and hazardous-material spills 24/7 from six offices located throughout the state, and works to assess and restore environmental damage resulting from spills. The program values and takes pride in being a results-oriented, collaborative and adaptable organization.

The program’s **mission** is to protect Washington’s environment, public health and safety through a comprehensive spill prevention, preparedness, and response program.

The program’s **vision** is to prevent, prepare for and respond aggressively to oil spills; to be our best for the state of Washington. Our spills goal is “zero spills.”

This strategic plan provides a framework for the Spills Program’s work over the next six years and will be used to guide progress toward reaching the vision. The strategic plan assumes additional program resources will eventually become available. If this occurs, the next two to six years will be a transformational period when the program will build upon its competencies to address the emerging issues of oil transportation and risk.

■ ■ Goals

Five goals are identified in this strategic plan that further the vision of the Spills Program. The goals are supported by strategies discussed in this plan. The goals include the following:

- I. Have a sustainable Spills Program that is future-focused and well-positioned to meet legislative and public expectations.
- II. Fulfill the promise of strong, collaborative partnerships by communicating and working effectively with our partners and other key stakeholders.
- III. Improve oil transportation safety to continue progress toward the Legislature’s desire for “zero spills” through prevention.
- IV. Protect resources at risk by diligently preparing to respond to spills.
- V. Provide response and restoration to spills and incidents in a rapid, aggressive and well-coordinated manner.

■ ■ Methodology

The strategic plan reflects and is aligned with the goals of the [Governor's Results Washington](#), [Ecology's strategic framework](#), applicable laws, the Spills Program's mission and vision and other strategic documents.

At the state level, the Governor's Results Washington sets clear goals for improvement and tracks results in order to show how state government is delivering services and meeting performance goals. Ecology's work supports Goal 3: Sustainable Energy and a Clean Environment and Goal 5: Efficient, Effective and Accountable Government. Work in the Spills Program also supports the agency's strategic priorities of preventing and reducing toxic threats, and protecting and restoring Puget Sound. Specifically, improvement of oil spill preparedness and response is identified as an Ecology strategy for protecting and restoring Puget Sound.

Additionally, the [2014 Marine and Rail Oil Transportation Study](#), which looked at the changing oil transportation landscape in the state and provided a number of key recommendations, is a significant driver of this strategic plan. Legislatively, the [2015 Oil Transportation Safety Act](#) provided a number of new measures to assist the Spills Program address the changing oil picture with a focus on crude by rail. Many of the recommendations and provisions of the study and safety act will be implemented as part of the strategies described in this plan.

■ ■ Relationship between the Strategic and Program Plans

The strategic plan provides broad direction for new and existing policy efforts. The plan will provide guidance to the program for a six-year period. Large-scale policy decisions made by the Spills Program, including future agency-request legislation, will be guided by the strategic plan. Goals and strategies identified in the plan will be further defined, prioritized and implemented in the program plan.

The program plan supports the strategic plan by providing information for staff and external stakeholders that describes the activities that will be completed to support the big-picture goals and strategies identified in the strategic plan. The program plan will also contain details regarding performance measures to reflect progress and identify funding needs that must be met in order to reach these goals. The program plan is redrafted each biennium and addresses the strategies from the strategic plan that are considered near-term priorities. As program resources and on-the-ground facts change, the program plan can be adjusted accordingly to reflect program changes and progress.

■ ■ Plan Terminology

The strategic and program plans are both developed using a consistent framework so decision makers, staff and stakeholders understand the structure of each plan and the connection between the two plans is clear. This framework presents a hierarchy of guidance that defines the broad purpose of the Spills Program, and provides more specific levels of guidance that show how the program intends to support its purpose and reach its goals.



The strategic plan is based on the following operational definitions:

The program’s **mission** describes the purpose of the program by answering: “Why does the program exist?”

The program’s **vision** supports the mission. It is a broad statement that provides a framework for the strategic-planning process by describing the desired future state of the program. The vision answers: “Where does the program want to be?”

The program’s **goals** provide direction for reaching the vision. The goals are broad statements about desired outcomes, but are more specific than a vision. They answer: “What does the program need to do to accomplish the vision?”

Strategies are developed to support the goals. They define directions, methods, processes, or steps used to achieve the goals. Strategies are more specific than goals and act as a link between goals and action items.

Action items implement strategies and support the strategic plan vision. They have measurable outcomes and describe the specific projects or activities necessary to reach the goals. Action items are linked to specific resources, have identified levels of responsibility and have a timeline for completion. They answer the question: “What will move our work forward?”

The goals support the vision, the strategies support the goals, and the action items support the strategies. Such hierarchy makes it clear to plan users that work completed connects to the higher-level policies and guidance that they seek to further.

Goals and Strategies

The Spills Program’s Strategic Plan proposes and represents goals and strategies to achieve bolder environmental outcomes for spill prevention, preparedness and response in the state of Washington. Successful implementation of the strategic plan requires support of program efforts from state and federal partners.

Below is a list of goals that Ecology will use to drive the Spills Program’s efforts for the next six years. The goals are not listed in a priority order, but rather by an order of convenience. For instance, Goal III is not necessarily a greater priority than Goal V. The five goals include an internally focused goal (Goal I), an external stakeholder goal (Goal II) and a goal each for prevention (Goal III), preparedness (Goal IV) and response (V). While the Statewide Resources Section is not specifically identified in any particular goal, the section supports the other sections and its work is represented throughout the plan.

In some cases the goals require additional funding and staff, and possibly new legislation or rulemaking. Some strategies are already in the current work plan but have been updated. Many of the strategies reflect legislative direction from the 2015 Oil Transportation Safety Act, which includes new safety measures for crude-by-rail transport. Other strategies are statements of future-level efforts that will be sought after and will be achieved as opportunities present themselves.

■ ■ Goal I: Have a sustainable Spills Program that is future-focused and well-positioned to meet legislative and public expectations.

Funding for the state Spills Program has not kept up with legislative appropriations since the barrel taxes were established in 1991. Historically, the Oil Spill Prevention Account has faced significant shortfalls, requiring budget intervention in order to maintain program activities. Additionally, as the risk picture has changed in recent years, the funding structure is no longer allocated to match the risk. Although the 2015 Oil Transportation Safety Act provides additional rail safety protection measures for the state, the total revenues from this legislation do not provide a long term funding resolution for the Spills Program. A sustainable funding source can help maintain positive morale in staff and retain the much-needed expertise in the program by ensuring job security. In addition to having adequate funding, it is important to have a program-wide culture of engagement for continued success.

Strategies:

1. Secure a sustainable funding source and policies to maintain the highest levels of spill prevention, preparedness and response activities in the state.
2. Evaluate the financial ability of the state to respond during a prolonged, major spill through the Oil Spill Response Account.

3. Utilize the Spills Engagement Team to maintain and improve a collaborative work environment that furthers agency and program goals.
4. Collect, analyze and present accurate and relevant data to support effective decision-making and performance measures.
5. Ensure that program staff are properly resourced and trained, with procedures in place to accomplish work.
6. Continue to incorporate Lean processes into program work to find efficiencies and improve outcomes.

■ Goal II: Fulfill the promise of strong, collaborative partnerships by communicating and working effectively with our partners and other key stakeholders.

The Spills Program works closely with federal, tribal, state and local partners, including the [United States Coast Guard](#), the [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#), the [United States Department of Transportation](#), the [Federal Railroad Administration](#), other federal and state agencies, counties, cities, industry and environmental organizations.

Recent crude-by-rail incidents in the United States and Canada highlight the risks of oil transported by rail. Risks to environmental, community and economic resources are heightened with the increase in crude by rail. Vessel traffic has also changed as a result of increased crude by rail and pipelines from domestic and Canadian oil production. Oil movement in neighboring British Columbia also creates potential risks for Washington State. The Spills Program will collaborate with its partners to address the new risks posed by this shift in the oil-transportation picture and develop sustainable solutions to protect Washington's resources. One example of this collaboration is the [Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force](#).

The 2014 Marine and Rail Oil Transportation Study identified areas of collaboration needed to increase the protection of Washington's waters. For example, Ecology and the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission were urged to develop Railroad Safety Committees similar to the U.S. Coast Guard-sponsored Harbor Safety Committees. Other recommendations identified collaborations with the Federal Railroad Administration, the Northwest Area Committee (NWAC), the Federal Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration and with Washington's Congressional delegation. The report also urged collaboration with state partners such as the Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners, the State Fire Marshal and other state-permitting agencies.

The program will actively work to strengthen relationships with the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies and stakeholders.

Strategies:

1. Improve the working relationship and protocols with the U.S. Coast Guard and Environmental Protection Agency for better coordination and cooperation.
2. Advocate greater rail-safety measures and requirements from the federal government and state partners.
3. Enhance Ecology's role on committees to promote prevention measures and achieve more uniform oil spill response standards and equipment capability.
4. Work with permitting agencies of new oil-related facilities to ensure thorough risk analysis is undertaken and appropriate safety measures are required if new facilities are permitted.
5. Keep tribes, communities, stakeholders and the public informed of the changing oil-transportation picture and associated impacts.
6. Continue to provide the highest levels of open dialogue, education and outreach that informs stakeholders and partners about the program's daily work and important issues.
7. Seek Congressional support to assist Washington State in addressing oil spill risks.

■ Goal III: Improve oil transportation safety to continue progress toward the Legislature's desire for "zero spills" through prevention.

The program's genesis was to provide leadership and coordination to assess and resolve spill threats to the state's treasured waters. Significant progress has been made through traditional prevention activities that emphasize vessel and facility inspections, technical assistance, regulation and inspection of high-risk oil transfers. Key risk factors, such as poor maintenance, procedural error and judgment, crew fatigue, reduced situational awareness (includes crewing standards), equipment failure and the lack of adequate company operating procedures and policies play a prominent role in marine incidents. Ecology will continue to emphasize human and organizational factors as the key to spill prevention in Washington's waters. The prevention goal is to be collaborative with regulators and industry to foster prevention improvements. It is re-emphasized by the program's compliance efforts that range from warnings to significant monetary penalties for spills. These activities must continue to fully meet the expectations of the Legislature and the state's citizens.

The risks associated with changing vessel traffic patterns on the Columbia River, Puget Sound, Grays Harbor, and at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca must continue to be analyzed and addressed, as must the changing risk pattern in inland areas due to movement of oil by rail. The Spills Program is responding to this change in oil transportation with a risk-based approach, relying on all available prevention tools within the program's authority. The new challenges build on the program's foundation for finding innovative ways to address emerging risks.

The 2015 Legislature specifically directed Ecology to evaluate vessel-traffic risks in the Columbia River and provide safety recommendations accordingly. The Legislature also provided long-term funding to conduct vessel traffic risk work in areas of the state where it presently does not exist and to periodically update this risk work in other locations to include Puget Sound. Support was also given to develop and periodically update a rail traffic risk assessment model to analyze changes in the rail transportation system. The Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners was also authorized to conduct rulemaking in Grays Harbor, conditioned on the approval of a crude oil facility in the area, to which Ecology will provide technical assistance.

This plan calls for several new or expanded risk assessment, management and communication activities that would enhance environmental protection. In completing these activities, the program will focus on the benefits to their primary customers – the public and environment – while striving to meet legislative direction.

With “customers” in mind, agency personnel will continue to work with regulators, vessel officers and crews, oil deliverers and industry representatives to heighten awareness and improve compliance with the international, federal and state regulatory regimes. Spills personnel will also continue to emphasize the use of voluntary measures, modeled on programs like the Harbor Safety Committee standards of care, the voluntary Best Achievable Protection (BAP) program and the Exceptional Compliance Program for tankers. The stakeholder work has been instrumental in dramatically reducing the rate of major oil spills in the last 20 years, and will be maintained as part of our program’s work.

Strategies:

1. Through accurate and relevant information assessment, maintain a clear understanding of the changing spill risks that face Washington State.
2. Provide incentives and technical assistance to companies to enhance their ability to comply with – and voluntarily exceed – industry, state, national and international safety and oil spill prevention standards and regulations.
3. Update inspection activities to anticipate evolving trends, while focusing on reducing risk through appropriate safety recommendations with industry and all levels of government.
4. Expand the preventative marine safety measures, relying on increased inspection activity, outreach and investigations that will help address oil spill risks, including commercial fishing and towing operations.
5. Ensure best industry practices and best achievable protection for regulated vessel operations and oil handling facilities, to include facility design to enhance environmental protection.

■ Goal IV: Protect resources at risk by diligently preparing to respond to spills.

It is important to provide local governments and tribes with accurate information and initial resources to respond to spills. By providing assistance such as equipment caches, advance notice information and access to geographic response plans (GRPs), those on the frontline will be better prepared to respond to a spill.

The Spills Program aims to ensure that measures for the best achievable protection (BAP) for a spill are in place. BAP is achieved by promoting the highest standards through the use of technology, maintaining the best model for use of multi-vessel, facility, pipeline and umbrella plans in this state, focusing on a rigorous drill program that measures the effectiveness of our plans, and folding lessons learned back into the contingency plans to improve them. The program held its first BAP conference for our communities and response partners in 2015. Initially the Legislature applied the requirement to maintain BAP only to regulated vessels. In the 2015 legislative session the requirement to ensure BAP was also applied to facilities. With the increase of crude by rail, the changing properties of oils and changing vessel traffic, the program will need to stay flexible to ensure BAP.

Under the framework of the Northwest Area Contingency Plan (NWACP), the Spills Program will enhance GRPs to protect areas vulnerable to spills from oil transported by vessel, rail and pipeline, or oil stored at facilities. BAP for crude by rail will also require well-thought-out contingency planning. This work will mirror the structure of contingency planning for vessels and facilities. By having contingency plans in place for rail, vessels and facilities, industry will be able to demonstrate through drills that they are prepared for an oil spill no matter the mode of transport.

Strategies:

1. Enhance GRPs to ensure swift and effective spill response throughout the state to protect sensitive resources.
2. Improve the capability to respond to spills in difficult environments and situations using BAP. This includes incidents in fast waters, under limited visibility and with oils that may sink or submerge in water.
3. Evolve the state's drill program to respond to various types and sizes of spills. Communicate results to our stakeholders.
4. Build on successful spill preparedness efforts, such as contingency planning for vessels and oil handling facilities, to address new spill risks from oil being transported via railroads.
5. Provide local communities, tribes and the public key information on oil movement.
6. Ensure all vessels and facilities demonstrate their ability to pay for response and recovery costs and damages from spills.
7. Manage a coordinated system for locating vessels of opportunity and other volunteers to assist before, during and after oil spills.

■ ■ Goal V: Provide response and restoration to spills and incidents in a rapid, aggressive and well-coordinated manner.

The public, elected officials and other stakeholders expect the private sector and government agencies to carry out a rapid, aggressive and well-coordinated response when incidents or threats of spills occur. Experience shows that anything less will not protect the environment, economy, or meet public expectations.

The Spills Program has made excellent progress since the late 1990's to improve response capabilities. The Spills Program is always looking to improve and enhance program work, particularly in co-managing major spills and incidents. This strategic plan commits the Spills Program to expanding its work with the broader response community through the NWAC. This applies during every spill in which an incident command is established, and in other venues, to deliver the most seamless, effective response possible. This includes expanding work with first response agencies and tribes throughout Washington to provide training and equipment.

Washington's unique Natural Resource Damage Assessment program allows compensation for injury to publicly-owned natural resources and restoration of impacted resources. The Spills Program will work with other federal and state resources trustee partners on efficient damage assessments. The program will also look for coordinated restoration opportunities for recovering injured resources.

The rapid, aggressive and well-coordinated response posture will require continued interagency collaboration and expansion of the NWACP policy. The policy does not change the Incident Command System's response objectives for specific incidents. For example, the first priority will always be the health and safety of the public and responders, followed by source control and environmental protection. A rapid and aggressive response must not be at the expense of safety.

Strategies:

1. Use best available technology and techniques when responding to spills.
2. Provide local governments, tribes and first responders the necessary tools and training to effectively respond to spills.
3. Assist in the environmentally sound removal and disposal of derelict vessels to minimize risk of pollutants spilling into state waters.
4. Work collaboratively with federal, tribal, state and local response partners to receive and provide timely notification of incidents and near misses. Ensure proper follow up, including non-jurisdictional incidents that threaten state resources.
5. Establish a well-managed Unified Command where Ecology is able to provide essential personnel and equipment while protecting the interests of Washington State.
6. Continue effective investigations to identify the causes of spills and hold responsible parties accountable through appropriate enforcement and cost recovery actions.
7. Ensure spillers restore injured resources.