

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE METRICS FOR OIL SPILL RESPONSE

A technical report submitted to the Coastal Response Research Center by



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Abstract

An intensification of interest in environmental assessment during the last two decades has driven corporate efforts to better document environmental goals, improve environmental management systems, and increase awareness of the environmental and ecological effects of business operations. This trend has been motivated partly by regulatory requirements (such as the Toxics Release Inventory in the United States and extended product responsibility laws in the European Union) and partly by the inclination of some large manufacturing firms to embrace a broader social and environmental mission characterized as ‘sustainability’ or ‘eco-efficiency.’ The importance of management for measurable objectives in the United States government has been recognized at least since the Government Performance Results Act of 1993, which was intended to both improve the efficiency of government and the confidence of the American public in government managers. However, in management of environmental crises – such as oil or chemical spills – development of measurable performance standards has lagged. Consequently, government spill managers are unable to define success in terms that are easily communicated to public and other stakeholder groups, and they may be disadvantaged in their efforts to deploy response resources with maximum efficiency. This paper reviews the current state of environmental assessment measures and compares that to current practices and strategic goals among federal agencies with regard to oil and chemical spills. A general typology of metrics applicable to spills is presented that may facilitate incorporation of existing metrics into spill response, restoration, and recovery planning and improve communication among different federal, state, and local agencies and public or stakeholder groups.

Introduction

A series of environment crises in the mid-to-late 1980s significantly raised public and private awareness of the need to be able to assess the broader environmental and ecological impacts of industrial activities. Incidents such as the catastrophic release of toxic chemicals from a Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, discovery of the stratospheric ozone ‘hole’ above Antarctica, and the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* in Prince William Sound, Alaska, focused intense interest on developing new methods of managing environmental risks that emphasize corporate accountability and quantitative management.

The Bhopal case is credited with motivating passage of amendments to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act of 1986 (EPA 2002) and the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 that created the Toxics Release Inventory (EPA 2005b), which requires publication of the total mass of reportable chemical releases by factories in the United States (Neumann 1998). Since its inception, the TRI has become a focal point of public attention that motivates ‘bad actors’ found at the top of the list of worst polluters to reduce chemical releases as a way of deflecting negative attention. Consequently, the TRI has been successful in that total reported releases have been trending down for over a decade (Figure 1).

The discovery of the ozone hole resulted in a nearly global ban on manufacture of chlorofluorocarbons (and their initial substitutes, hydrochlorofluorocarbons). With respect to stratospheric ozone depletion, the environmental effects of these compounds is characterized by *ozone depletion potential* (ODP), a measure of the capacity of a chemical released at the surface of the earth to destroy ozone in the stratosphere relative to the destructive capacity of CFC-11. Negotiation of the international treaty (the Montreal Protocol) that promulgated the manufacturing ban relied heavily on the ODP measure (WMO 2003). The success of the ODP approach has led to a proliferation of other novel environmental assessment measures such as global warming potential (GWP) (WMO 2003), tropospheric ozone formation potential, human toxicity potential, pollution potential, and others (e.g., Hertwich et al. 1997). Each measure is designed to inform management, policy, or design decisions in relation to environmental or ecological dimensions that may have not been considered by previous generations. In the sense that stratospheric ozone levels have stabilized and likely increased in recent years (Figure 2), the ODP concept has been successful in the design of effective policy measures.

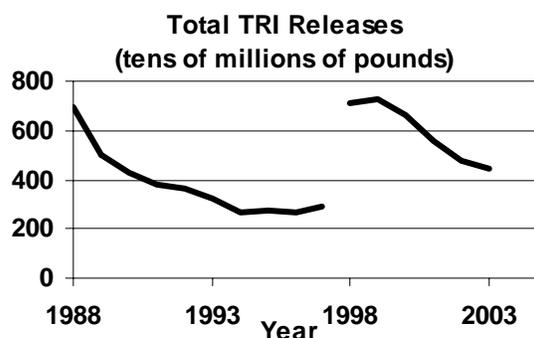


Figure 1. Total reportable toxic releases have trended downward since reporting requirements have taken effect. The total number of industries required to report expanded in 1998, accounting for the jump in that year (TRI 2006).

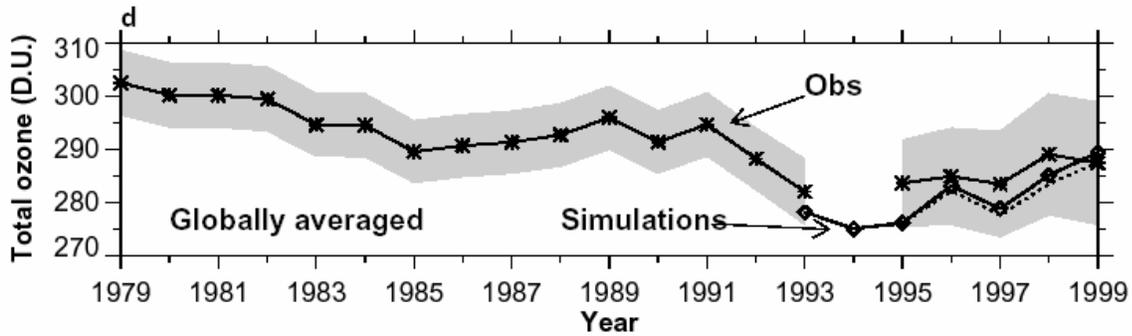


Figure 2: Total stratospheric ozone levels – measured in Dobson Units – are now increasing as a result of the Montreal Protocol prohibition on manufacture of ozone depleting substances (from Egorova et al. 2001).

By contrast, the regulatory response to the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* catastrophe has emphasized better planning and coordination, increased accountability, investment in response equipment and technologies, and preventive shipping regulations such as double hulled tankers or crew work rules (Tannahill & Steen 2001). However, it has not resulted in the advancement of quantitative strategic goals to track the success of efforts to minimize the damage caused by oil spills. Although the frequency of domestic spills has declined precipitously since passage the Act (Figure 3), the effectiveness of response efforts is more difficult to gauge (partly because spills are rarer than ever – Kim 2002). Depending upon the location, size, timing, and environmental conditions of the spill, the potential ecological effects are highly variable. Consequently, establishing a baseline context in which to measure the effectiveness of a response is extremely challenging. Nonetheless, oil spills, like other environmental crises such as hurricanes, forest fires, and terrorist attacks, create both acute and chronic disturbances to sensitive ecological systems. As part of ongoing efforts to improve national, state, and local spill preparedness, extensive planning and coordinating efforts have been undertaken during the last fifteen years, culminating in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the National Response Plan (DHS 2004). In the case of oil spills, the NRP “describes the lead coordination roles, the division and specification of responsibilities among Federal agencies (particularly the US Coast Guard, Environmental Protection Agency) under anticipated crisis scenarios and the national,

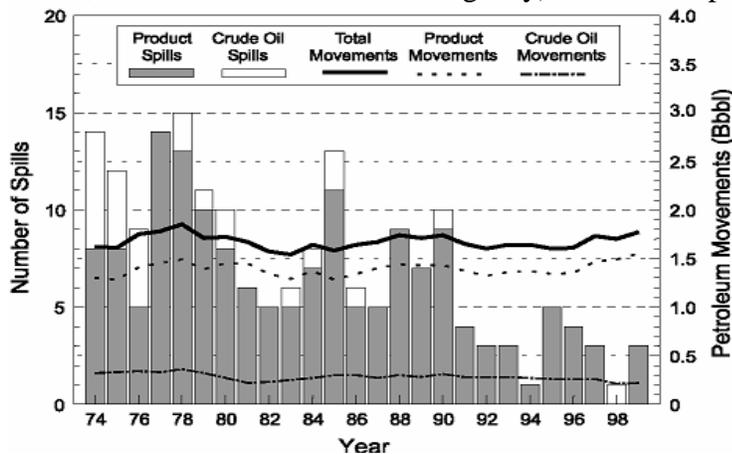


Figure 3. Number of petroleum spills from barges greater than 1000bbl vs. total movements in US waters from Anderson & LaBelle 2000).

regional, and onsite response organizations, personnel, and resources that may be used to support response actions” (DHS 2004 p.ESF#10-1, parentheses added). Although in the case of firefighting response policies, the NRP specifies an explicit hierarchy in which “priority is given to public and firefighter safety and protecting property, in that order” (DHS 2004, p. ESF#4-1), the guidance offered oil spill managers is more general and flexible:

Initial actions... may include assess(ing) the situation, including the nature, amount, and locations of actual or potential releases of oil and hazardous materials; pathways to human and environmental exposure; probable direction and time of travel of the materials; potential impact on human health, welfare, safety, and the environment; types, availability, and location of response resources, technical support, decontamination and cleanup services; and priorities for protecting human health and welfare and the environment through appropriate prevention and/or response actions (DHS 2004 ESF#10-7).

The fact that priorities must be identified early and on a case-by-case basis increases the complexity and challenge faced by spill managers (Grabowski et al. 1997). To further complicate matters, the NRP does not give guidance on how to incorporate stakeholder or public views into the initial assessment of priorities. Consequently, setting objectives, tracking progress and communicating or determining success is an *ad hoc* process depending upon the experience of the on-scene coordinator (OSC) and the level of interaction with state, local or other non-federal government groups outside the command structure, including the media. Even in the case that the response is closely coordinated among agencies and planning documents are scrupulously adhered to, public perceptions may be that the response has failed – partly because it is not apparent what normative standards of success should be applied or how the measures of success employed by decision-makers will be interpreted by the public or intermediaries (such as journalists or non-government organizations; see Chess et al. 2005). These aspects of oil spill response planning have not been given sufficient attention (Harrald 1994).

On the other hand, in private organizations (such as manufacturing firms), there has been an increasing recognition of the need to evaluate the effectiveness of environmental practices, remedial efforts, and performance goals and measures as part of a comprehensive environmental management strategy (e.g., Olsthoorn et al. 2001, Schulze 1999, CIEPM 1999, GEMI 1998, OECD 1998). More stringent reporting requirements, tighter product or emission constraints, consumer demands, the availability of international management standards (i.e., ISO 14001) and international agreements (such as the Montreal and Kyoto Protocols) have driven industry attention toward more quantitative management practices and improved environmental assessment methods. In the last fifteen years, there has been an enormous expansion of environmental performance indicators and assessment tools, such as eco-efficiency, life-cycle assessment, ecological footprint analysis, and others (Gray & Wiederman 1999, Hammond et al. 1995).

This paper reviews current quantitative environmental assessment metrics, discusses the qualities that make for effective vs. ineffective metrics, contrasts government and industry practices, and proposes a new typology of oil spill performance metrics that may improve communication between different stakeholder and responder organizations and facilitate analysis of the different perspectives, objectives, or concerns of agency and non-government personnel.

The Evolution of Environmental Assessment

As the focus on environmental management has shifted from reactive or remediative to proactive and preventive, industrial firms have implemented more sophisticated environmental

management systems (such as ISO 14001) to better document chemical releases, resource consumption, and potential environmental and ecological effects. Concurrent with these developments in industry has been an increased emphasis by researchers on the quantitative *assessment* of the environmental and ecological effects of industrial activities. Although historically assessment had been focused on the toxicological properties of specific chemicals, the success of new measures such as ODP and GWP in gauging non-toxic hazards has spurred a rapid expansion of measures designed to inform managers, policy-makers, and designers of broader implications such as smog formation, acidification, biodiversity, ecosystem health, or resource depletion. In general, the boundaries of interest have expanded beyond the classic toxicological approach to *ecotoxicology* and even broader indicators of ecosystem health (e.g., Rapport 1999) or sustainability (e.g., Hammond et al. 1995). In ecotoxicology, the human toxicological model is extended to more complete ecosystems, including exposure through food webs and bioaccumulative effects (Schuurmann & Market 1998). In sustainability, the primary tool of quantitative analysis is life cycle assessment, where the emphasis is on the industrial product or material chain, and in aggregating all resources consumed (such as energy) and chemical releases concomitant to resource extraction, production, use, and disposal of a specific product (Seager & Theis 2004).

The expansion of interests and metrics has led to an increased level of sophistication in both the interpretation of assessments and the methods for conducting them. However, there is still considerable doubt among managers and researchers as to which metrics are most important, whether metrics accurately capture the intended effect, and whether the metrics employed will have meaning to customers or stakeholder groups (e.g., Chess et al. 2005). Once a metric is implemented, it becomes a tool for prioritization, resource allocation, or intentional structuring of management efforts to shape a system in accordance with organizational objectives. Therefore, the selected metrics are an expression of the values that guide the activities of an organization and must be designed with the objectives of the organization in mind.

There are three general approaches to characterizing environmental metrics described in the literature. Metrics may be sorted by their mathematical properties, relation to organizational objectives, or position in a cause-and-effect chronological sequence. Each approach is briefly described in subsequent paragraphs. In later sections, we introduce two additional approaches to characterizing performance metrics that are helpful to think about in terms of stakeholder relations and management. The first of these is a taxonomy that focuses on the values a metric is intended to reflect. The second is a typology of oil spill response metrics that characterizes management metrics as resource, process, or endpoint related. Each of these characterization approaches is intended to be complementary rather than comprehensive.

Mathematical

Metrics may be quantitative (such as length), semi-quantitative (such as an ordinal ranking), non-quantitative (such as a favorite color), or qualitative (better or worse), although without a context for comparison, any metric is meaningless. For simple systems, such as board or computer games, metrics may be simple to design, easy to enumerate and interpret, and inexpensive to gather data on. However, establishing good metrics for complex environmental and ecological systems presents a significant challenge. Both natural and human systems are complicated and

relate to one another in an infinite number of ways. Consequently, any set of metrics is incomplete and may at best be considered only *representative* of the myriad of decision factors that could be brought to bear on the situation. For this reason, metrics are often referred to as *indicators* to emphasize the representational relationship these measures have to the state of complex systems. They are indicative – but not definitive – gauges, and consequently must be interpreted with their limitations in mind.

The total amount of information obtainable to describe the state of any system may be infinite. As the quantity of information increases, the ease of interpretation of that information decreases. Therefore, it is essential to aggregate measures to provide a simpler assessment of progress with respect to a single dimension. Aggregation mathematically combines related measures – for example, by summing, averaging, or combining by more complex methods such as net present value computation. Data may be aggregated over a geographic area, over time, or other independent variables such as species, habitat type, or demographic profile. Aggregated data are easier to work with, but contain less information than the original data set from which aggregated measures are compiled (Figure 4). Moreover, the mathematical methods used to aggregate different measures may constrain or confuse the interpretation of those methods. Particular attention must be paid to aggregation of data that is expressed in different units.

Methodologically unsound approaches to aggregation may render information meaningless or cause managers to reach unsound conclusions. For example, it is not proper to add *intensive* measures (which are expressed as ratios or percent) such as concentration (e.g., mg/l or ppm) or miles per gallon unless the units are first converted to *extensive* measures with identical units.

Even more problematic is aggregating data that may relate to qualitatively different objectives. For example, it is common to assess the severity of an oil spill by estimating the volume of oil released into the environment. However, the ecotoxicity of oil varies according to the type of oil and particular hydrocarbon components. Where spills of different types are compared, an eco-toxicity-weighted approach may provide a different perspective than a simple mass-based approach. With regard to the TRI, a toxicity-weighted aggregation has been proposed as an improvement on conventional mass-based reporting (Horvath et al. 1995). Whenever qualitative characteristics can differentiate data, aggregation inevitably involves application of a value-based weighting scheme (such as a weighted average) that emphasizes some aspects more than others.

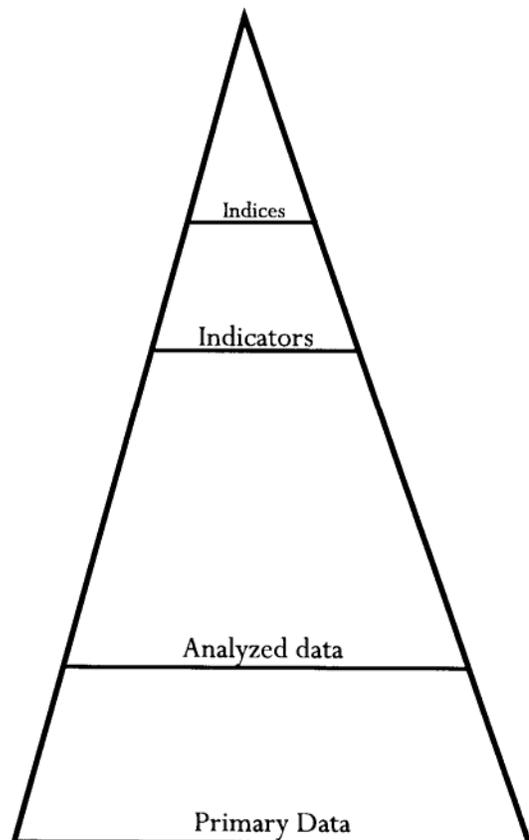


Figure 4. The information pyramid (from Hammond et al. 1996).

Organizational Objective

Decision-making in any organization typically includes three levels of thinking: strategic, tactical, and operational. The strategic level is the broadest level. It typically involves longer-term planning and is intended to align all components of an organization toward realization of strategic objectives. Tactical decision-making typically engages an intermediate time frame. At the tactical level, organizational units may select from several alternative approaches to implementing a strategy, especially with regard to the response of other groups or systems to the alternatives chosen. Lastly, operational decision-making engages the shortest time frames. Operations typically are those specific actions that together form the tactical alternative.

In relation to oil spills, strategic thinking may involve prevention, preparedness, response, mitigation, or restoration. In the case of response planning specifically, decision-makers must be prepared for many different contingencies. Strategy may involve the purchase and pre-positioning of equipment, delineation of responsibilities or organizational authority, or dedication of other resources. Therefore, decisions made at the strategic level create and constrain alternatives at the tactical level (Wilhelm & Srinivasa 1997). In response to a specific spill, tactical decision-making involves the deployment of resources and selection of alternatives specific to the circumstances of the spill. At the operational level, the effectiveness of the tactical decisions must be assessed in relation to specific equipment or other resources. For example, protection of an estuary in an oil spill may involve a strategy of containment to prevent incursion of a spill into estuarine tributaries. Containment booms must be purchased and pre-positioned to enable this strategy. In the event of a spill, the tactical response may be to deploy booms in the areas considered at risk, while at the operational level the effectiveness of the booms in containing the slick must be assessed. If either the operational execution fails (e.g., the slick runs under the boom), or the tactical response is inadequate (e.g., booms are not deployed), then the overall strategy may fail. Similarly, if the strategy is flawed (e.g., oil becomes uncontainable by either sinking or emulsifying), the tactical and operational efforts based upon that strategy may be pointless. To monitor the effectiveness of strategic, tactical, and operational efforts, it is essential to design metrics that inform all three levels of thinking.

Relational

With regard to environmental risks, indicators may be characterized as descriptive of three different stages of hazard development: *pressure*, *state*, or *response* (Gray & Wiedeman 1999). Pressure indicators relate to the level of stress placed upon the environment by human systems, whereas state indicators relate to characterization of environmental-ecological systems. Response indicators relate to the changes in human systems that eventually result from the overall chain of cause-and-effect relationships. For example, oil spills pressure the environment, thereby effecting a change in the environmental or ecological state – such as the presence of a slick or reduced bird populations. The anthropogenic response may be mechanical recovery, chemical dispersants, burning, bioremediation of the oil, or restoration of bird habitat. Ultimately, the human response may be political (such as increased regulation) rather than technological.

Valuational

The existing literature characterizing indicators and performance metrics emphasize the *way* the metric is expressed (mathematical), the *purpose* of the metric (within the organization) and the relationship between different indicators. However, more recently attention has shifted to indicators as an expression of the *values* of an organization and as a method of facilitating communication both within the organization and with outside or stakeholder groups (e.g., Chess et al. 2005). In this regard it is helpful to create a taxonomy that classifies different indicators according to their qualitative, value-based characteristics (Seager & Theis 2004).

Virtually all metrics relevant to chemical release management may be characterized into five broad dimensions: economic, thermodynamic, environmental, ecological, and socio-political. However, no single tool or approach encompasses all of these dimensions. For example, in the life cycle assessment model developed by the USEPA (EPA 2005c), impacts are broken down into six categories: ozone depletion, global warming, photochemical oxidation, eutrophication, acidification, and human and environmental health effects. Although each of these relates to a recognizable environmental problem, the purpose of the life cycle approach is narrowly focused on environmental assessment rather than holistic decision-making. As they relate to oil spills, the broader categories are described below (and in further detail in Seager & Theis 2004):

- **Economic.** In addition to direct and indirect costs, economic metrics convert non-market resources or impacts into monetary values to allow comparison with monetary transactions or industrial accounts. Economic estimates of non-market impacts are required by benefit-cost analysis, for estimating the value of damages caused by an oil spill in terms of fish catch, property damage, clean up costs, or for prioritizing new investments. Broader economic analysis could include estimates of lost tourism revenues, decreased property values, or opportunity costs (Loureiro et al. 2006). In theory, proper pricing of environmental goods and services could allow market forces to optimally allocate resources between ecological and industrial activities. However, in practice both the calculation methods and the validity of the concept of pricing the environment are recognized as controversial. Because there are no markets for most environmental goods, such as pollution attenuation, external or social costs are highly uncertain, as are the methods and figures reported for the value of ecosystem services. Moreover, monetization may lead to the erroneous assumption that environmental exploitation can be reversible in a manner analogous to pecuniary transactions, although in some cases ecological systems may be damaged beyond recovery.
- **Thermodynamic** metrics such as total pollutant loading or release are indicative of environmental *pressure* (e.g., pollution to be attenuated), whereas measures such as energy use are more indicative of resource consumption or scarcity. Sometimes, thermodynamic metrics are normalized to *intensive* units such as kg/person or oil equivalents of energy/product, which attempt to capture the *eco-efficiency* of a process. However, in the case of oil spills, *extensive* measures such as total barrels lost or recovered are appropriate. Usually thermodynamic metrics do not indicate the specific environmental response associated with resource consumption or loss. For example, the

severity of an oil spill may be determined on the basis of total volume spilled. Nonetheless, ecological effects are dependent upon a number of other factors such as the type of oil and the location, mobility, and timing of the spill. On the basis of a thermodynamic measure called *emergy*, which measures energy consumption in terms of the equivalent solar energy required to replace the consumption, Odum (1996) criticized the extensive clean up efforts that followed the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* as an unproductive deployment of energy resources. His study claimed that more diesel fuel was expended on clean up efforts than barrels of oil were lost in the spill. Nonetheless, thermodynamic metrics are only indirectly related to the human and ecological health objectives that guide oil spill response. (Conservation of diesel fuel is not the primary objective of any large spill response.)

- **Environmental** metrics estimate the extent of chemical change or hazard in the environment. Environmental metrics often use physical or chemical units such as pH, temperature, or concentration. Concentration measures – especially for toxic oil components such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) – are difficult to put in an appropriate context unless they are tied to some ecological or human manifestation such as death, cancer, mutation, or even non-health based endpoints such as beach or fisheries closures. Environmental metrics may use physical or chemical units, but they can be distinguishable from thermodynamic metrics by the fact that they typically are intended to measure environmental loadings or changes rather than resource demands. They are generally measures of the residuals released by industrial processes into the environment and are indicative of environmental *state* (e.g., chemical contamination) – but rarely *response*.
- **Ecological** metrics attempt to estimate the effects of human intervention on natural systems in ways that are related to living things and ecosystem functions. The rates of species extinction and loss of biodiversity are good examples, and they are incorporated into the concept of ecosystem health (Rapport 1999, Rapport et al. 1998). Oiled bird counts, marine mammal death counts, and time to ecological recovery are all examples of ecological metrics.
- **Socio-political** metrics evaluate whether industrial activities are consistent with political goals like energy independence or eco-justice, or whether collaborative relationships exist that foster social solutions to shared problems. Major oil spills undoubtedly have far-reaching social and political impacts (e.g., Shaw 1992). However, these are difficult to gauge quantitatively. In some cases, the political and social dimensions are translated or communicated primarily through the media. That is, although spill responders may understand the importance of public perceptions, they may have no basis for measuring improvement or deterioration of public sentiment, except through the tone of media coverage – which they may feel powerless to influence (Harrold 1994).

As a general rule, aggregating data across two different dimensions, such as economic and thermodynamic, is a dangerous approach. Metrics that are designed to capture qualitatively different characteristics are incomparable. However, to gain an overall sense of the state of a system, it may be necessary to evaluate trade-offs between different dimensions. For example,

how much money and energy should be spent cleaning beaches to improve environmental measures such as oil concentration or appearance if few (if any) ecological benefits result? Assessing such inter-dimensional trade-offs is a value-laden problem suitable for multi-criteria decision analysis (Linkov et al. 2006a; Linkov et al. 2006b).

Application of the life cycle assessment methods developed for assessing industrial processes is not likely to be directly applicable to oil spills. Although the metrics themselves (such as GWP or human and ecological toxicity) may be accurate, the methods for gathering and analyzing data will likely be very different when the focus is on a catastrophic, unplanned release instead of on product life cycle. Moreover, the focus in oil spill management is on minimizing acute impact categories (such as ecotoxicity) rather than on chronic effects such as global warming or eutrophication.

Nonetheless, meaningful decision processes must inevitably rely upon some credible assessment measures that are accessible or explainable to the public. To date, planning efforts have focused more on defining resource availability, agency responsibility, and coordination rather than definitions of success and feedback measures. Therefore, it is essential to consider what information is available to spill responders, when it is available, the quality of the information, and its relevance to the purpose of the response. An ideal metric would have several characteristics (Graedel & Allenby 2002, Seager & Theis 2004):

- **It would be scientifically verifiable.** Two independent assessments would yield similar results.
- **It would be cost-effective.** It would use technology that is economically feasible and does not require an intensive deployment of labor to track.
- **It would be easy to communicate to a wide audience.** People at large would understand the scale and context and be able to interpret the metric with little additional explanation.
- **It would relate to something that is important to many stakeholders.** There is no point assembling a metric no one cares about.
- **It can be changed by human intervention.** The metric would have a causal relationship between the state of the system and the variables that are under a decision-maker's control. Metrics that are independent of human action do not inform a management, policy-making, or design process.
- **It would be credible.** It would be perceived by most of the stakeholders as accurately measuring what it is intended to measure.
- **It would be scalable over an appropriate time period and geographic region.** It would be indicative of short, medium, and/or long term effects as appropriate. For example, it would not be meaningful to attempt to measure the effects of chronic low-level toxic dosages over a period of weeks or months, just as it would not be appropriate to average local environmental conditions over a widely varying region.
- **It would be relevant.** It would reflect the priorities of the public and other stakeholders and enhance the ability of spill managers and/or regulators to faithfully execute their stewardship responsibilities.
- **It would be sensitive** enough to capture the minimum meaningful level of change or make the smallest distinctions that are still significant, and it would have uncertainty bounds that are easy to communicate.

It may be difficult, if not impossible, to find metrics that satisfy all of these conditions for all stakeholders. Nevertheless, a suite of metrics that have several of these characteristics may prove to be especially useful to spill managers. In press accounts, damage assessment reports, and conversations with oil spill experts, it is clear that there are many performance metrics in play during any given spill. Although new metrics may enhance the information available to decision-makers, what is most likely called for first is an explicit approach to organizing the metrics already available: that is, assessing the quality of the metric with respect to the ideal characteristics listed above, understanding what the metric is intended to describe and how, what level of organizational thinking the metric relates, the cause and effect relation between metrics, and to whom the metrics are important. Table 1 summarizes the previous sections to create a comprehensive scheme for characterizing indicators and performance metrics. Table 2 classifies a number of example oil spill metrics with regard to the multiple value-based dimensions described in the previous section.

Table 1: Characterization of Indicators and Performance Metrics

Mathematical		Organizational Objective		Relational	
quantitative semi-quantitative non-quantitative qualitative		strategic tactical operational		pressure state response	
Valuational					
economic	thermodynamic	environmental	ecological	socio-political	

Table 2: Multi-dimensional Oil Spill Metrics

Economic	Thermodynamic	Environmental	Ecological	Socio-Political
○ Clean up costs.	○ Volume of oil spilled, recovered, destroyed, or contained.	○ Chemical concentration and toxicity.	○ Wildlife deaths or populations, fecundity and recovery rates.	○ Newspaper column inches, minutes TV coverage, web hits.
○ Property & ecosystem damage.	○ Slick area and thickness.	○ Habitat suitability, e.g., acres shellfish bed.	○ Biodiversity.	○ Volunteerism.
○ Ecosystem damages or lost services.	○ Mass of clean up wastes generated.	○ Length of oiled shoreline.	○ Catch sizes.	○ Public meeting attendance.
○ Lost marginal profits.	○ Volume cleaning agent deployed.	○ Degradation rates.	○ Plantings, seedings.	○ Direct messages (email, letters, phone calls).
○ Volunteer opportunity costs.				

Environmental Performance Metrics in Federal Agencies

Within government, the primary regulatory driver of performance measurement has been the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. GPRA requires federal agencies to prepare performance reports which are then reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). GPRA was enacted to “provide for the establishment of strategic planning and performance measurement in the Federal Government” (OMB, 2005a). It embodied a push for better planning, greater accountability, and straightforward performance evaluation in government. The GPRA requires a federal program to have an overall strategic plan and to prepare annual performance plans and reports (OMB, 2005b).

Many federal agencies use performance measures to assess their progress toward achieving ecological or environmental goals. Different agencies are in differing stages of performance metric adoption. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is explicit in articulating performance measures for increasing the number of fish stocks managed at sustainable levels. NOAA defines performance measures as “indicators of conditions in natural and human systems that have been selected as targets for restoration. Collectively, a well-selected set of performance measures provides a quantitative representation of the overall environmental health of these systems” (NOAA, 2005c). Some agencies have explicit goals but leave performance measures implicit in their strategic plan documents. For example, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service states the specific goal of de-listing 15 species from the Endangered Species Act between 2000 and 2005. The number of listed endangered species is the metric implied.

The development of performance metrics is not always straightforward. Problems commonly arise when attempting to measure the performance of programs that:

- have outcomes that are extremely difficult to measure,
- have many contributors to a desired outcome,
- have results that will not be achieved for many years,
- are characterized by causal relationships or feedbacks are not well understood,
- relate to inherently uncertain or stochastic systems,
- operate at multiple temporal and spatial scales,
- relate to deterrence or prevention of specific behaviors,
- have multiple purposes and funding that can be used for a range of activities, and
- are administrative or process oriented, relating to bureaucratic effectiveness, rather than outcomes-based (OMB, 2005c).

With regard to tactical metrics in particular, written information describing Federal agency ecological and environmental metrics is scant. For example, the number of fish stocks managed at sustainable levels is an effective metric in the sense that it has many of the ‘ideal’ qualities listed above. It is verifiable, easy to communicate, important to a wide range of stakeholders, likely responsive to human intervention, credible, scalable, relevant, and sensitive. In relation to Table 1, the number of sustainable fish stocks can be described as *quantitative*, *strategic*, and descriptive of the *state* of the *ecological* system. However, to achieve the goal of improving this metric, it is essential to understand what sort of tactical measures (i.e., alternatives such as catch

limits or habitat restoration) the responsible Federal agency can deploy and the effectiveness of the operations involved (such as dam removal, fish ladder installation, or conservation areas).

Table 3: Example Performance Metrics for Select Federal Agencies

Agency	Topic	Strategic / Intermediate Objective	Performance Goal / Measure
NOAA (2004)	Healthy and productive coastal and marine ecosystems that benefit society	Increase number of fish stocks managed at sustainable levels	Number of overfished major stocks of fish Number of major stocks with an “unknown” stock status Percentage of plans to rebuild overfished major stocks to sustainable levels
USFS (2004)	Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire	Improve the health of NFS lands that have the greatest potential for catastrophic wildland fire	Number of acres of hazardous fuels treated in the wildland-urban interface and percent identified as high priority Number of acres in the wildland-urban interface treated per \$1 million gross investment
US FWS (2000)	Sustainability of fish and wildlife populations	Lessen number of imperiled species	Through 2005, 371 species listed under the Endangered Species Act as endangered or threatened for a decade or more either stable or improving, 15 species de-listed due to recovery, and the listing of 12 species at risk is made unnecessary due to conservation agreements
EPA (2003)	Clean air and global climate change	Healthier outdoor air	Reduce stationary source emissions of nitrogen oxides by 3 million tons from the 2000 level of 5.1 million tons by 2008 Reduce mobile source emissions of nitrogen oxides by 3.4 million tons from the 2000 level of 11.8 million tons by 2010
DOE (2003)	To protect the environment by providing a responsible resolution to the environmental legacy of the Cold War	Accelerate cleanup of nuclear weapons manufacturing and testing sites	Complete cleanup of 108 of 114 sites by 2025

Oil Spill Performance Metrics

While many federal agencies have developed ecological performance metrics, few specifically address oil spill *impacts* (Table 4). For example, the USEPA Strategic Plan 2003-2008 performance measures related to oil spills are predicated on the number of spill responses and the percentage of oil storage facilities inspected, rather than the severity of the spills or damage that results (EPA 2003c). The US Department of Transportation has targeted a 20% reduction in the volume of oil spilled by maritime shipping sources and by piped sources between the years 2001

and 2006 (DOT 2002). While a laudable goal, this performance metric is unaffected by spill response and is independent of the ecological damage caused.

However, the State of Rhode Island has established an *Incident Severity Scale* to better gauge the potential impact of spills with regard to human safety and environmental threats (RIDEM 2004). Although the size of the spill is important, the Rhode Island approach also accounts for other factors that may mitigate or exacerbate the effects of the oil. The scale ranges from minor (Category 1) to severe (Category 4) and is assessed on the basis of four general criteria:

1. proximity to or danger to critical areas,
2. level of public concern,
3. association with enforcement actions, and
4. threat to public health or welfare.

An effective response presumably results in reduction of the severity of the spill by addressing each of these four general areas. Although the RI approach is semi-quantitative (i.e., an ordinal ranking rather than a cardinal scale) and the assessment may rely heavily on subjective or expert judgment, the approach holds promise for organizing response efforts and focusing communications with the public on mitigation of the potential impacts of the spill. For example, the RI system is reminiscent of the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale (NOAA 2005b). The public readily understands the scale, the basis for establishing it (maximum sustained wind speed), and the relationship of hurricane strength to risk. Preparations and response, including evacuation in extreme circumstances, are facilitated by the fact that the Saffir-Simpson scale has gained broad acceptance. An analogous system of assessing and communicating oil spill severity such as the Rhode Island system may be similarly advantageous, although it is likely to need to be more sophisticated. At the tactical and operation level, it may be possible to study alternatives or technologies that are effective in reducing the strategic goal of reduced spill severity.

Kuchin and Hereth (1999) note that despite the necessity of critical success factors and measures of outcomes, they “found no comprehensive system, agreed upon by the response community, that systematically evaluates the success of the response effort.” They discuss an evaluation model which includes essentially the same criteria identified by the RI approach, with the additional consideration of economics and organization:

1. human health and safety,
2. natural environment,
3. economic impact,
4. public communication,
5. stakeholder service and support, and
6. response organization.

After each criteria is evaluated, they are integrated as part of a “balanced response scorecard” for measuring the success of spill response.

Table 4: Selected Oil Spill Performance Metrics

Agency	Example Goal / Topic	Strategic / Intermediate Objective	Performance Goal / Measure
USEPA (2003)	Land preservation and restoration: Restore land	Prepare for and respond to accidental and intentional releases	Each year through 2008, respond to 350 hazardous substance releases and 300 oil spills Each year through 2008, minimize impacts of potential oil spills by inspecting or conducting exercises or drills at 6 percent of approximately 6,000 oil storage facilities required to have Facility Response Plans
USDOT (2002)	Oil and pipeline spills	Reduce amount of oil spilled by 20 percent by 2006	Gallons spilled per million gallons shipped by maritime sources Tons of hazardous liquid materials spilled per million ton-miles shipped by pipelines
NOAA (2004)	Environmentally sound development and use of the US transportation system	Reduce human risk, environmental and economic consequences resulting from natural or human-induced emergencies	Listed as "To be determined"

The NOAA Office of Response and Restoration (ORR) also recognizes the value of a multifaceted approach in discussion of the critical success factors (Ott 2006). The factors over which ORR may exercise some influence are:

1. human health,
2. natural environment,
3. economy, and
4. stakeholder support.

In comparison to Kuchin and Hereth (1999), the ORR approach segregates the importance of an effective response organization as an administrative rather than outcomes-based metric, and it lumps "communication" and "stakeholder service and support" into a single, broader category. The ORR approach also recognizes the importance of "leading indicator" metrics (such as hours worked) that are indicative of progress toward the eventual goal. Although they are not direct measures of the goal itself, such as safeguarding human or ecological health, the leading indicator metrics can be used to gauge the intensity of efforts or forecast potential outcomes. ORR identifies four "key elements" to a successful response: objectives, organization, resources and mobilization.

Most performance measurements reported in the peer-reviewed literature describing spill response are operational metrics developed decades ago to evaluate the technical efficiency of slick skimmers (Schwartz, 1979; Lichte, 1979). Similar evaluations are still performed (Drieu & Hansen, 2003), and they may play an important role in assessing the effectiveness of mechanical

recovery efforts, but they do not capture the broader ecological consequences of the spills. For example, the only performance metric that Luna Caicedo and Bastos Neto (2003) report with regard to a terrestrial oil spill response in Brazil is the efficiency (87%) of spilled oil recovered in one year of operation.

Dix and Hutley (2005) focus on measures of spill response 'velocity.' They suggest the time for equipment to arrive on scene, or the time required for the incident command to order initial resources through the incident command system, as a metric for initial response velocity. Additionally, they propose to monitor the tapering rate of funds expenditure as a metric for deceleration or demobilization velocity. Like the evaluations described above, they also use equipment efficiency and project cost as metrics for the oil recovery phase of the response. This approach, however, is most effective for gauging the effectiveness of organizational or administrative efforts. It does not describe the effectiveness of those efforts with regard to ecological or economic outcomes. Moreover, response time is a resource-based operational measure rather than an endpoint measure related to a strategic goal. Consequently, response velocity may be most meaningful within the response organization itself and less effective for communicating with public or stakeholder groups.

Interpretation: A Typology of Oil Spill Performance Metrics

Oil spill response requires a rapid integration of several different organizations and government agencies with different areas of expertise, resources, and concerns. To reach maximum effectiveness, such a complex system must be focused on a set of shared goals that can clearly be articulated to outside groups. To date, oil spill contingency planning has focused primarily on the rules for establishing the organization itself (such as command and communications structures), or resource and technology development, rather than measures of effectiveness that are meaningful to stakeholder or public communities (Harrald 1994). Consequently, spill managers may be unprepared to define the essential criteria for success, or filter the wealth of imperfect and rapidly changing information available to focus the organization on the salient objectives. Moreover, without clearly defined goals, it is difficult to respond to feedback, adapt to changing circumstances, or assess the effectiveness of response strategies. The result may be that personnel from different agencies feel disconnected from one another and/or the public at large. At worst, they may be working towards cross-purposes.

For example, in a typical oil spill, response and damage assessment are conducted separately. The former entails establishing an *ad hoc* command structure, deploying resources, and making rapid judgments regarding initial efforts. The latter requires careful sampling and data collection, calibration of mathematical models, and scientific review. Different skill sets, thought patterns and time frames are required. Although close cooperation of first responders with damage assessors may be advantageous, it is unlikely to occur spontaneously in the midst of a crisis. Adding to the complexity of the problem is the fact that multiple stakeholders and public groups may hold mutually exclusive views about the best possible response. In this case, there is no response alternative that is likely to satisfy all parties.

To establish a set of metrics acceptable or communicable to all groups that can effectively define the success of a spill response, it is necessary to understand the concerns of all the parties

involved. In addition to being related to the six broad value-based criteria outlined above, different metrics may be relevant to different stages of oil spill response, recovery and restoration. Figure 5 depicts a typology of oil spill metrics that shows both how oil spill management progresses in time (from left to right) and how metrics may be characterized as resource, process, or end-point based. An effective response will mitigate the damaging economic, thermodynamic, environmental, ecological, and socio/political effects. Because these are manifested on different time scales, leading indicator metrics are essential to provide feedback to the response organization and allow adaptation to changing or unexpected events. As a response efforts progress, the locus of concern moves from the lower left hand corner of the graph towards the upper right. That is, resources are required to drive processes which are directed at endpoints. However, response phase endpoints soon become recovery phase resources, and so on.

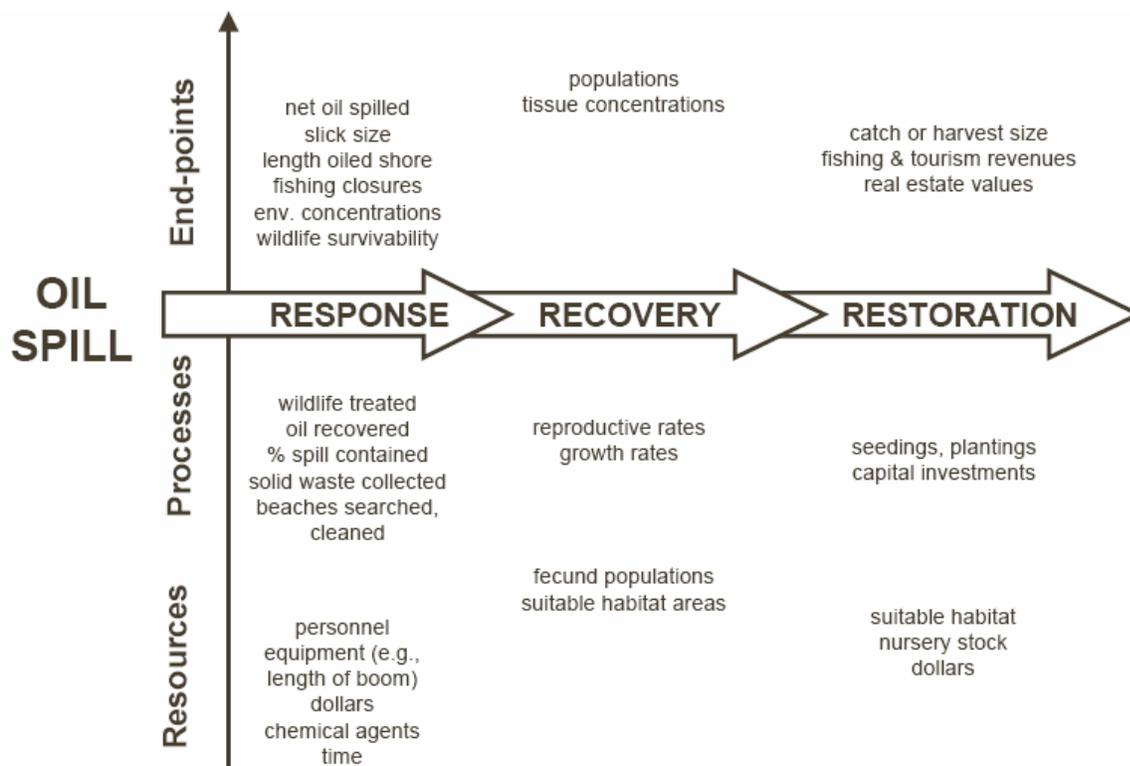


Figure 5: Typology of Oil Spill Response & Assessment Metrics. Management of oil spills may be characterized in three stages that generally blend together: response, recovery, and restoration. Each stage is overlapping in time, read from left to right in the direction of the block arrows. Within each stage, progress is from the lower edge of the figure towards the top as resources are applied in processes that are intended to improve endpoints. Decisions made in early stages may have a direct impact upon the resources, alternatives, and endpoints in other stages. However, different stakeholders and government agencies are likely to have different areas of concern or different priorities within the same area. Mapping these concerns provides a visual depiction of potential opportunities for better communication and coordination, as well as potential conflicts.

As different organizations become engaged in managing the spill, the metrics relevant to those organizations efforts can be plotted in the metrics map depicted by Figure 5. For example, mechanical recovery contractors will be primarily concerned with resources availability and

operational effectiveness in recovering oil and emulsion from the environment. The metrics relevant to their work will be found in the lower left-hand region. A wildlife biologist, on the other hand, may be more concerned with habitat restoration and population recovery – concerns better plotted closer to the upper right-hand corner. Considering the distance between these two perspectives, it may be challenging to communicate to contractors how their efforts or decisions influence the measures of concern to the biologist. Opportunities for closer coordination can be identified where two different agencies identify measurable objectives that are plotted at some distance apart on the map. These agencies (or stakeholder or public groups) may disagree entirely on the perceived success of spill management efforts simply because they are examining different aspects of those efforts.

Alternatively, where concerns are overlapping, they are not necessarily in agreement. For example, there may be disagreement on the appropriate response in very early stages of a spill such as whether to burn, chemically disperse, or attempt mechanical recovery of the oil from the environment. Although the measures that define success (such as slick area, water column concentrations, or total uncontained oil) may plot on overlapping areas of the map, groups may place different emphasis on the different metrics relevant to that stage. Conflict will result, but this could likely be identified ahead of time if the contrasting value systems can be elicited or revealed.

Conclusions

Both industry and government have moved towards more quantitative approaches to environmental management in the years since the environmental crises of the 1980s. In areas that involve chronic environmental effects from continuous activities, such as release of toxic or ozone depleting chemicals, rapid progress has been made in establishing indicators and performance metrics to guide policy and decision-making. However, in crisis response, such as oil spills, quantitative management approaches have developed more slowly. Consequently, crisis managers are challenged to define success in terms that are easily verifiable and communicable to diverse stakeholder groups.

To develop more effective environmental performance metrics, and better understand the role of existing metrics, metrics may be characterized in several different ways: mathematical, organizational, relational, and valuational. Effective metrics of all types share qualities such as verifiability, cost-effectiveness, communicability, importance, credibility, scalability, control, relevance, and sensitivity. Also, oil spill management metrics may be identified as resource, process, or endpoint (i.e., outcomes) based within the three major phases of the spill: response, recovery, and restoration. Creating effective metrics for oil spill response and understanding which metrics are important to the different people and organizations involved may result in more closely coordinated response efforts that are more satisfying of and responsive to stakeholder concerns.

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