



THE RESOURCES AGENCY
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME



History of the California Office of Spill Prevention and Response

The Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR), the pollution division of the Department of Fish and Game, is the lead State agency in charge of California's oil spill prevention, preparedness, response, and natural resource restoration. The 1989 Exxon-Valdez oil spill in Alaska prompted many government agencies to review their ability to respond to major oil spills. The 1990 American Trader spill off Orange County increased the pressure on California's legislature to ensure this state's capabilities. As a result, the OSPR was established by the Lempert-Keene-Seastrand Oil Spill Prevention and Response Act (The Act). The Act passed in September of 1990, followed by the federal Oil Pollution Act (OPA-90) in October. The Act gives the OSPR Administrator substantial authority to direct all oil spill prevention, response and clean-up activities, natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) and restoration, as well as the authority to conduct studies and incorporate the findings into spill prevention and response programs throughout California.

As a division of the Department of Fish and Game, OSPR retains the Department's regulatory authority and public trustee responsibility to protect and manage the State's wildlife, plants, and their habitats. The Department is the only coastal state agency in the United States that has a combined regulatory, pollution response, and public trustee authority for wildlife resources. The OSPR's combined regulatory and trustee authority assures that oil spill prevention, as well as response, will safeguard wildlife and the ecosystems in which they live, and restore habitats damaged by pollution incidents.

In 1993, OSPR created California's Oil Spill Contingency Plan. This comprehensive document updates contingency planning, describes spill response roles, and outlines OSPR's relationships with other agencies. Prevention responsibilities are shared with agencies represented on the State Interagency Oil Spill Committee (SIOSC). The OSPR Administrator chairs SIOSC and keeps those 22 agencies informed through that committee.

The Act required the OSPR Administrator to establish rescue and rehabilitation stations for sea otters, sea birds, and other animals at risk from oil spills. In 1993, the State Legislature amended the Act to provide funding to support that mandate. Interest earned on the \$50 million State Oil Spill Response Trust Fund would be dedicated to the establishment and operation of a statewide Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN). This network of wildlife care organizations is ready to respond to oil spills up and down the state's coastal areas. The legislation mandated the construction of specially-designed and staffed oiled wildlife care centers and improvements to existing facilities for wildlife rescue and equipment and training for participating members of the OWCN.

The first of those centers opened in February 1997, at Humboldt State University in Arcata. In July of that year, OSPR dedicated its state-of-the-art Marine Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center in Santa Cruz, especially designed and staffed to care for the southern sea otter population, which has yet to recover from being driven nearly to extinction by nineteenth-century fur hunters. The pace of construction and collaboration with other organizations quickened, and the SeaWorld San Diego Oiled Wildlife Care Center opened in 2000; the San Francisco Bay Oiled Wildlife Care and Education Center in Cordelia (Solano County) and the Los Angeles Oiled Bird Care and Education Center in San Pedro opened in early 2001.

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By 2002, the OWCN had grown to include 25 participating organizations and twelve primary response facilities. The Network is truly a collaborative effort, in which government, nonprofit organizations, and commercial interests work together to provide California's wildlife with the best achievable protection, using the best available technology. And they do it all, without any tax dollars.

In 1995, the OSPR published the Coastal Protection Review (CPR), which outlines California's oil spill readiness by describing the overall state of protection and response in California. Vessel and marine facility risks are reviewed and the available equipment and technologies to offset this potential risk are discussed. Prevention and preparedness programs are also described in the CPR.

OSPR is involved in a variety of programs to reduce oil spills and their impact on the environment. One of these programs is the creation and utilization of Harbor Safety Committees in the State's five busiest commercial ports. Each Harbor Safety Committee has developed a harbor safety plan, designed to reduce the risk of accidents within or on approach to major harbor facilities. The plans are updated, annually.

In another project, OSPR conducted a comprehensive study on statewide pilotage. Also in conjunction with navigational safety, OSPR and the U.S. Coast Guard evaluate vessel traffic routing and other safety measures to reduce pollution incidents off California's coast. To that end, OSPR contributes to the funding and implementation of the Vessel Traffic Information Service (VTIS) for Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors.

According to the National Research Council, an estimated 3.5 million tons of oil end up in marine waters, every year. Nearly 90 percent of that oil comes from such non-point sources as urban run-off and recreational boating. The most common sources of oily substances in marine waters from boaters include 2-stroke engines, careless fueling habits, sloppy engine maintenance and repair, discharging oily bilge wastes, and improper oil disposal. Because of this, OSPR has developed an Education-Outreach Program to inform recreational boaters and other small craft users in California of the many ways they can prevent these small but chronic spills of petroleum products. Small craft refueling docks, as defined in the Act, are required to register with the OSPR and participate in the Education-Outreach program.