

Regional Response Team/Northwest Area Committee Geographic Response Plans

What are Geographic Response Plans?

As part of the Northwest Area Contingency Plan (NWACP), Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) are oil spill response plans for public marine and inland waters. Each GRP has two priorities: identification of sensitive natural and cultural resources in a specific geographic region; and to describe and prioritize response strategies to protect these resources during the initial phase of an oil spill. Currently, all coastal and selected inland water areas in Washington and Oregon are covered by 24 regional GRPs.

How are the GRPs used?

Each GRP contains a list of pre-planned response strategies that can be put into effect immediately by initial responders to protect critical public resources during the first few hours of an oil spill. Once a coordinated response has been established, the GRP protection strategies are refined and supplemented based on real-time assessments. Each regional GRP includes spill contact information, site descriptions, reference maps, prioritized response protection strategies, shoreline information, sensitive resource descriptions, and logistical information.

Testing GRP Strategies

Oil spill response contractors frequently test specific GRP strategies at the actual site. Testing provides an opportunity for response contractors to verify feasibility, deploy equipment, and train personnel to ensure that they are prepared for a real oil spill.

How are the GRPs developed?

GRPs are developed through workshops involving federal, state, and local oil spill emergency response experts, representatives from tribes, industry, ports, environmental organizations, pilots and response contractors. Workshop participants identify resources which require protection, develop operational strategies, and pinpoint logistical support. Through this process, GRPs have been developed for marine waters of Washington and Oregon State, the Columbia River, and selected inland waters of Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Scope of GRPs

GRPs only address the protection of sensitive *public* resources. Not all sensitive resources can be protected.



The protection strategies in the GRPs have been designed for use with persistent oils and may not be suitable for other petroleum or hazardous substances. In addition, environmental conditions (wind, currents, and tides), together with the physical limitations of existing spill response technology, may preclude the effective protection of some areas. The development of any protection strategies for private economic resources (including but not limited to: commercial marinas, private water intakes, non-release aquaculture facilities) are the responsibility of the private resource owner or the “responsible party.”

How are the GRPs maintained?

The Washington Department of Ecology (WDOE) is responsible for maintaining, updating, and distributing GRPs for Washington and the Lower Columbia River. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) is responsible for GRPs in Oregon. The Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10, is responsible for the Middle Columbia River and Snake River GRPs. Efforts are constantly being made to find better ways of protecting natural resources. Response strategies are refined and updated as a result of field visits and tests, oil spill drills, and the “lessons learned” from actual oil spills. Current versions of the GRPs are posted on the Northwest Area Committee/Regional Response Team website at: <http://www.rtt10nwac.com/>, together with links to the WDOE, ODEQ, USCG and the EPA websites. Using GRPs is a proven process that has become part of the Northwest Area’s standard pollution response.