

Training to Deal With an Oily Mess

By John T. Tanacredi

Every year in this country more than 10,000 oil and hazardous material spills are recorded by the U.S. Coast Guard. These spills empty around 14 million gallons of materials into our coastal environment. For shore cleanup alone the bill surpasses \$80 million annually.

With tankers whose capacity exceeds a quarter million tons, and with the knowledge that these materials, once they get into the coastal ecosystem network, will continue for years to leach out and seep through the systems, it is imperative that our natural resource managers become familiar with various detection, clean-up, and monitoring techniques.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has a primary role in this effort. Every two years, EPA par-



EPA test tank at Leonardo, N.J. serves as demonstration and training facility for exercises in handling oil and hazardous material spills.

ticipates in a major international conference addressing the issues of oil pollutional loads as they impact on our coastal environments. In order to assist our new North Atlantic Region resource management trainees and the Gateway NRA staff, a one-day tour was arranged recently at the USEPA's Oil and Hazardous Materials Simulated Environmental Test Tank (OHMSETT) in Leonardo, N.J. This facility provides an environmentally safe place to conduct testing and development of devices and techniques for the control and clean-up of oil and hazardous materials spills.

The facility's primary feature is a concrete tank, 667 feet long, 65 feet wide, and 8 feet deep. The tank can be filled with either fresh or salt water and is spanned by a bridge capable of towing floating equipment at speeds of 6.5 knots for approximately 40 seconds. The towing bridge is equipped to lay oil or hazardous materials on the surface of the water several meters ahead of the device being tested, so that reproducible thicknesses and widths of the test slicks can be achieved.

The principal systems of the OHMSETT tank include a wave generator and absorber beach that can produce and withstand regular waves to two feet in height. A filtering system of diatomaceous earth keeps water clear for underwater photographic work and video imagery and removes pollutants that enter the tank water as a result of testing.

This government-owned, contractor-operated facility is available for testing purposes on a cost-reimbursable basis. The USEPA provides expertise in the area of spill control technology and overall project direction. The OHMSETT facility houses a quality control laboratory to test waters in the tank prior to recycling.

Approximately 15 NPS staff people attended such a field exercise and I believe that the experience added greatly to our Region's general alertness to the potential hazards from oil and hazardous material spills that face all our coastal parks.

Information about the OHMSETT facility can be obtained by calling (201) 321-6629; for information on oil/hazardous materials research, call Tanacredi at FTS 665-3730.

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