

8.1 Overall strategy

For oil spills at sea which are likely to pose a threat to coastal resources, the appropriate response actions at sea, such as dispersant spraying from aircraft will be taken by the MCA as part of the MRC.

When the oil drifts into waters close to the shore or shoreline pollution occurs, any clean-up action becomes the responsibility of the local authority with advice and assistance from the MCA and consultation with other bodies in the SRC, such as the relevant statutory nature conservation body (English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage), Fisheries Departments and the Environment Agency. For a shoreline clean-up operation to be successful, it is essential that a contingency plan has been prepared beforehand (see Chapter 4). The plan should clearly set out which clean-up methods are most appropriate for a given type of oil, size of spillage, its location and expected movement and the different types of coastline present in the area. The plan will also define the responsibilities of key personnel and will identify sources of manpower and equipment.

Booms and other barriers (Chapter 5) are used to limit the spread of oil or even to concentrate and reduce the area of a slick, improving the chances of effective recovery. If oil cannot be prevented from coming ashore, such barriers can be used to protect particular areas, e.g. public amenities, wildlife sanctuaries or simply those parts of the coastline that would be particularly difficult to clean. Booms can also be used to divert oil to locations where it can be easily recovered.

Recovery of the oil is the most desirable clean-up option but may not always be practical. Where recovery is not feasible and sensitive resources are threatened, the prompt use of chemical dispersants to assist the process of natural dispersal into the sea may be the best option but it will depend on environmental considerations, the type of oil and how long the oil has weathered.

Whichever approach is used, it is highly desirable to minimise the amount of oil that reaches the shore and to limit the area of coastline affected. The cost and length of time taken to complete cleaning and the time for recovery of the coastal environment will all be lessened if the spillage can be dealt with while still on water.

8.2 The Beachmaster

The Beachmaster is the name given to the person who is the overall supervisor of a specified section of coast in a shoreline response operation. The Beachmaster has complete responsibility for all personnel and activities and is the operations manager at the front line of the response.

8.2.1 Qualities required of a Beachmaster

The individual must have a level of competence consistent with the technical nature of the operation. More complex operations involving highly technical activities will demand a greater skill level than more simple operations. In general, the Beachmaster role requires initiative, practicality and the ability to improvise. Man management experience is extremely important including the ability to motivate and manage unskilled labour. For example, on sites with large numbers of operatives conducting a boring task in adverse conditions, man management skills are of utmost importance.

The Beachmaster must have a sound knowledge of HSE Rules and be aware of where to seek advice in the case of difficult operations and/or hostile and challenging worksites (see Chapter 9). A formal risk assessment must be carried out before any operations begin. The risk assessment should only be carried out by suitably a qualified person. All risks will be recorded on the formal site and activity risk assessment and the Beachmaster must ensure that the risks are managed according to that document. Serious account must be taken of changing risks as a result of variables such as tides, weather or oil type. The provision of first aid cover should be organised by the response centre but on a day-to-day basis is the Beachmaster's responsibility.

8.2.2 The roles of the Beachmaster

The Beachmaster implements the cleanup strategy as laid down by the Technical Team of the SRC and ensures that the clean-up techniques are those ordered and that they are correctly applied by the clean-up teams. The Beach Master is responsible for all aspects of operational record-keeping and reports back to the SRC on progress and problems.

Although the overall response techniques will have been agreed by the Technical Team of the SRC, it is important that techniques being employed on the shoreline are properly carried out in a technically reasonable manner and the Beachmaster has this responsibility. For example, the unnecessary overuse of heavy plant can very quickly result in the generation of massive quantities of oily beach material. Alternatively a very slow operation to remove bulk oil during a period of rising tides may result in significant re-mobilisation of oil or mixing into the shore substrate. If unsure about the appropriateness of particular techniques, the Beachmaster should seek advice from the SRC.

The Beachmaster reports back to the SRC and this enables the SRC to confirm that the clean-up strategy is going ahead as agreed and that the manpower and equipment levels are consistent with the operational requirement. Exactly what is being done by who must be recorded to support future cost recovery claims for manpower, equipment and consumables.

8.3 The clean-up teams

Although clean-up operatives' formal occupational qualifications will likely be checked by the Technical Team in the SRC, it is a responsibility of the Beachmaster to ensure that all regulated activities are only carried out by individuals holding the relevant qualifications/licences. Local authority technical departments will be able to advise on specific requirements and the associated regulations and legislation.

It is important not to underestimate welfare issues of the clean-up teams. Beach clean-up is often hard, boring and dirty work. The success of operations will be heavily influenced by the quality of morale of the workforce. Considerations which the Beachmaster ought to consider are the provision of appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), food and hot/cold drinks appropriate for the prevailing conditions, toilet and washing facilities and decontamination facilities.

The Beachmaster, with advice from the SRC, is responsible for determining the minimum requirement for PPE and to ensure that all personnel are adequately equipped according to the nature of the operation. Precautions must be taken to:

- avoid any skin contact with pollutant or the inhalation of oil/chemical fumes;
- ensure the integrity and appropriateness of protective clothing;
- ensure that PPE is utilised effectively; and
- provide timely advice to all personnel on good safe practice.