



The Good Oil

issue one

November 2004

Welcome to The Good Oil – an e-newsletter designed to keep Council media & communications staff in touch with what's happening in the oil spill response (OSR) area of the Maritime Safety Authority (MSA). I'll try and get this out every 6-8 weeks and welcome any ideas/comment/contributions/feedback - this can be emailed to:

<mailto:steve.corbett@msa.govt.nz>.

Who am I? For those of you I haven't yet met, I'm Steve Corbett and I've been at MSA's Wellington head office for six months now. My job is to act as comms adviser for our Marine Pollution



Response Services (MPRS) who are based in Auckland and assume the role of Media & Community relations (MC) manager should a Tier 3 OSR occur. I've been working in comms for a few years now and have previously worked at the Ministry of Education and the Department of Corrections.

What have I done so far? PR firm Hill & Knowlton previously managed OSR media and community activity. To date my focus has been on ensuring MSA can manage this area now that it is in-house. To help this I've developed some educational/media resources, redrafted our national contingency plan to reflect the new role, re-designed the MC part of our training courses for on-scene commanders and council management staff, developed sector and media databases and tried to work out what the heck this business is all about and get myself ready in case the proverbial really hits the fan!

The resources include seven fact sheets: The MSA, Oil spill equipment, Oil spill response, All about oil, Oil and its biological impact, Preparedness, International agencies & Facts and statistics. Most of these are ready now but are waiting for the new MSA website (*see below*) to get up and running before being published. Please let me know if you'd find them useful and I can email you a copy.

Latest news 1): Minister of Conservation (and local MP) Chris Carter visited MPRS on Friday October 15th and was given a run-down on OSR and equipment. He was impressed with the cross-agency cooperation we encourage and the level of planning and preparation we have to go to.



L-R Operations Manager Neil Rowarth, Chris Carter, Director Maritime Safety Russell Kilvington, MPRS GM Nick Quinn.

2) The last 'Marine Oil Spill Management' course for 2004 has been run. Attendees with a good mixture of roles and abilities coped well with the two practical exercises that are run at the end of each course. They also responded well to the MC presentation, which basically teaches them how to develop and use key messages. Feedback from previous courses is that participants enjoy general media training but I wonder whether that's really MSA's role? I feel a little uncomfortable lecturing council staff on how to deal with media when you guys may have totally different methods and rationales-any comments? On the subject of training courses, we run two – 'Fundamentals of OSR' and 'Marine Oil Spill Field Operations' which I'd encourage you to get on – they're well run, informative and a bit of fun (as well as getting you outta the office for a couple of days!) Contact your Regional On-scene Commander (ROSC) for details.

What's next?

1) I've met with seven councils so far and discussed my immediate priorities which are: to develop an interim capacity for MSA to handle MC management in a Tier 3 OSR by identifying a small team that I can call on to assist me on-site; to get an MoU signed up that allows this to happen; to build and train this team on general and MC OSR management and to build relationships with all councils and provide them with information on OSR. To help this I've developed a resource for council media/comms staff to outline our ideas for MC management. I'll be sending these out shortly mainly as a reference guide.

Longer term I'll be looking at how MSA can build closer relationships with councils and strengthen the joint ability to respond successfully to oil spills.

2) As a result of the Government's Transport Sector Review, MSA will be re-named and re-branded in the next few months...watch this space!

3) MSA launched its new recreational boating TV campaign (based on listening to the marine weather forecast) on Sunday October 31st. Brand new ad - so have a look and let me know what you think.

4) That same weekend a second MSA website 'www.stayontop.org.nz' went live. The site contains info based around our safety campaigns. The existing MSA website will then be re-developed. This will be an opportunity to update and improve info on



OSR – including the new fact sheets. Anything you'd like to see on there?

5) International Maritime Organisation (IMO) secretary-general Efthimios Mitropoulos stated what comms advisers always expected to be the obvious when at a recent Salvage conference he said,

"Environmental damage hits headlines and arouses indignation to a far greater extent than does the loss of seafarers' lives.

"While this balance is regrettable, it was in some ways understandable due to the impact pollution could have on people's livelihoods and the local economy.

"Whole communities could be affected so it is little wonder that this concern is reflected in both the extensive coverage such incidents receive in the media and in the elevated positions they achieve in the politicians' priority lists".

6) The last of the fuel oil trapped inside the wreck of the *Prestige* has now been recovered. The *Prestige* sank off the Spanish coast in 2002 with the loss of 77,000 tonnes of oil.

The project recovered 13,600 tonnes of fuel oil that sank with the ship to a depth of almost 4,000m-the first time a recovery operation has worked at anything like that depth.

An interesting conflict has arisen over the recovery costs with the ship's P&I insurer, the London Club, questioning the sense behind the recovery operation, which will have cost Spain around E100m of public money once it is completed.

"It is doubtful that pollution damage claims of an equivalent magnitude would ever arise if the oil remaining in the wreck were to be left in situ and therefore the cost-effectiveness of this operation is questionable," the club said in its annual report.

But Ramón Hernán, director for the oil company's Europe, Africa and Asia division says such arguments, though perhaps logical, failed to grasp the economic, social and even emotional uncertainty generated in Spain by the presence of the wreck.

"The experience of the *Prestige* spill had been a very tough one and it was necessary to undertake a project that would ease the population's fears that this would occur once again," he says. "The only solution in that respect was to extract the fuel."

"There were other options - for example, covering or burying the wreck - but this would have meant hiding the problem, not dealing with it."

"The peace of mind of the people in the region who rely on the sea for their livelihood, the peace of mind that comes from knowing that this fuel will never again reach their coasts, if you compare the cost against this, it is perfectly reasonable."

Quotable quotes:

"Treat the media as you would any other watchdog – Stay calm, be friendly, let them sniff your handand never turn your back."

Anon.

"If I am in a minority of one it does not mean to say I am wrong."

Former England rugby boss Sir Clive Woodward

"There was a spell in the second half when I took my heart off my sleeve and put it in my mouth."

QPR soccer boss Ian Holloway

Thanks to all those who have given up some of their time to meet with me and share some of their knowledge and experience. I'm looking forward to working with you and meeting those I haven't caught up with yet.

Hope you've enjoyed the first issue of The Good Oil

Regards

Steve

