



# The Good Oil

# issue two

# December 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). Comment/contributions/feedback are welcome and can be emailed to: <mailto:steve.corbett@msa.govt.nz>.

## Latest news

1) The first steps have been taken to review the New Zealand Marine Oil Spill Response Strategy with a series of workshops being held with key stakeholders including regional councils, the oil industry and the National On-Scene Commanders.

The workshops aimed to draw on the experience and views of those invited to find out what might need revision in the Strategy and what other issues could be included in the review.

Much of the discussion centred on issues surrounding the links between prevention and response, the definition of T1 and T2 responses, the roles of agencies involved, the escalation of T2 responses, and places of refuge.

Public consultation on the draft Strategy and its presentation to the Oil Pollution Advisory Committee (OPAC) will be completed by June 2005 and it is expected to be released in early 2006.

2) The MSA legal team continues work on drafting a MoU to cover media & comms staff being coopted onto a Tier 3 OSR team. Hopefully we should have this completed and out to the regions early in the new year. Thanks to Nikki at Environment Southland for her help on this.



3) The team at MPRS (Marine Pollution Response Services) have taken delivery of NZ's first oil skimmer barge. The barge is being leased to the New Zealand Refining Company and will be stationed at Marsden Point. It will give NZ an on-water capacity during an oil spill. The barge can be used to collect and retrieve oil, spread dispersant or place a skimmer. An official launch is planned for early next year.

4) The Regional Council workshop was held last month with 45 delegates attending from around the regions. There will be a series of new initiatives resulting from this workshop – the major one being a move to the e-climate through the hosting of a vast majority of oil spill information on the new MSA website. So there is plenty of change in the wind to *how* information is relayed – but not a lot on how to respond to a catastrophe!

5) By now you should all have received the handout *'Media and community relations in a Tier 3 oil spill response'*. It is a 'live' document intended to fill an information gap and provide a brief intro to how MSA intends to manage this part of an OSR. How much it is kept to in the heat of the moment remains to be seen! Further pages/resources will be sent out when finalised. Notification procedures and working with MSA are two that will be added.

6) While there has been a downturn in the number of OSR worldwide, recent incidents underline the importance of preparedness:

**The *Selendang Ayu*** broke into almost equal halves after drifting powerless for more than two days in a remote region 1,300 km southwest of Anchorage in Alaska.

She was carrying 1,595 tonnes of intermediate fuel oil and 70 tonnes of diesel and there are now fears of a disastrous oil spill in an environmentally sensitive area.



Tragically six crewmen were killed when a US Coast Guard helicopter, which had managed to rescue the remainder of the crew, crashed into the sea.

The area has a wildlife refuge and is a breeding ground for sealions, harbour seals, sea otters, tanner crabs and halibut. More information on: <http://www.piersystem.com/external/index.cfm?cid=912>

**In America the *Athos I*** was holed (apparently by a rusty cast-iron pipe hidden on the riverbed) on the Delaware River resulting in an oil slick covering a 45-mile stretch of the Delaware River from just south of Philadelphia to New Jersey's Salem County near the mouth of the river.

Estimates on the amount of oil spilled vary but worst-case scenarios put it at 473,500 gallons, or about 11,000 barrels.

Wildlife experts from Tri State Bird Rescue, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and New Jersey and Pennsylvania state wildlife agencies are working to retrieve and treat oiled wildlife. 50 birds affected by the spill had been captured, of which about half were cleaned. A total of 16 birds were confirmed dead but environmentalists have warned that the total loss of fauna could be much worse.

Many skimmer vessels are on the river continuing to pick up floating oil. Clean up crews along the shoreline are using 37,000 feet of protective boom, absorbent pads, and vacuum trucks to remove the spilled materials.

An additional 170 workers will be added to the efforts bringing the total to 400 people involved in the clean up.

There's an excellent incident site at [www.ocean.udel.edu/oilspill](http://www.ocean.udel.edu/oilspill)



A containership collision in the Pearl River delta has caused **China's worst oil spill**. The German-owned *MSC Ilona*, sailing from Shenzhen to Singapore, had a gash torn out of its side by a cargo hold tearing into the fuel tanks with more than 450 tonnes of bunker fuel pouring out into the waters 20 nautical miles south of Chiwan container terminal. Chinese authorities worked to contain the damage with more than 50 vessels involved in the clean-up operation as the oil slick stretched nine miles at its worst.

A large crude carrier, the **Al Samidoon**, has reportedly spilt up to 10,000 tons of crude oil after colliding with a structure in the **Suez Canal**. An inquiry into the cause of the incident has begun as clean-up operations proceed. Navigation through the waterway has been unaffected by the accident and no casualties were reported

And as if those weren't sobering enough...

A leading UK security firm says an **attempted al-Qa'eda attack** on a significant maritime target should be expected in 2005. Aegis Defence Services says the new head of al-Qa'eda in Saudi Arabia, Saud Hamud al-Utaibi, is a maritime specialist and allegedly helped organise attacks on two US warships, most notably USS Cole in 2000. An Aegis report says al-Qa'eda play to their strengths and if they have got a maritime specialist, the chances of an attack on the maritime sector are higher.

7) The repercussions from an oil spill can drag on and on. Despite the *Prestige* incident happening over two years ago issues continue to bubble away:

- The master of the *Prestige*, arrested in 2002, still faces charges of disobeying the Spanish authorities during the early hours of the casualty and contributing to a major pollution incident. Capt. Mangouras rejects the accusations against him and insists that he risked his life and did everything possible to save his crippled ship.
- The *Prestige* casualty focused unprecedented attention on the shipping industry and left behind an image crisis that will take years of proactive communication to address. Because investigations and legal proceedings continue in various jurisdictions the public knows little more about the causes and the responsibilities than it already knew just a few months after the ship sank. In their eye, the inescapable conclusion is that those responsible for the *Prestige* disaster, whoever they may be, have yet to be held accountable.

- The Paris appeal court will next month be asked to decide whether a new investigation is needed before the case against those charged with responsibility for the *Erika*, which broke-up and sank off the coast of Brittany in 1999, can come to court.
- The decision of the appeal court will be particularly important for the Total oil group, which is seeking to demonstrate that, as the charterer of the *Erika*, it bore no responsibility for the break-up of the vessel and the subsequent pollution it caused along 400 km of French coastline. With a trial still possibly two years away there must be some doubt as to whether justice can still be rendered so long after the event.
- The European Court of Justice has asked Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and the UK to appear before it for not implementing legislation on vessel traffic monitoring – a directive dating back to the *Erika* incident. “Five years after the wreck of the *Erika* and three years after that of the *Prestige*, I am appalled that member states delay the implementation of key measures to improve maritime safety,” said EU transport commissioner Jacques Barrot.

(source: Lloyds List)

8) The president of the International Salvage Union, Hans van Rooij, has called on the IMO to introduce a new **casualty management initiative**. He says while most IMO conventions are aimed at accident prevention or address the consequences of spills, there is no comprehensive IMO convention dealing specifically and comprehensively with casualty management - the response when accidents do occur despite all preventive efforts.

“There is a strong case for setting an international standard of best practice which encourages a fully integrated response involving vessel owner, salvor, coastal state and response agencies. Van Rooij says ordering a ship out is no longer an “easy choice”, as the *Prestige* demonstrated - this can contribute to catastrophe.

He explains: “The best hope of a favourable outcome when pollution threatens is structured risk assessment in order to find the best environmental option, together with the political courage to exercise that option.”

9) Now this guy seems to understand the importance of good comms!

IMO secretary-general Efthimios Mitropoulos has called for the shipping industry to work together to engage the public and the media to “tell them our story.”

“It is a great shame – and grossly unfair – that many politicians and the public are often quick to criticise and condemn when something goes wrong in shipping.

“When good things happen in our industry, and I would include the everyday miracle of the safe and clean delivery of more than 90% of the world’s goods by sea, they go largely unnoticed.

“We need to tell the world about the millions of tons of cargo – fuel, raw materials and foodstuffs - that are carried safely around the world every day, how shipping underpins even the poorest of the world’s economies and creates wealth through trade and the employment opportunities shipping provides for its huge workforce.”

Despite figures released last year that showed that since 1998 the merchant vessel loss rate per 1000 units has been consistently lower than the commercial aircraft rate, shipping seems to suffer from being conducted largely away from the public eye.

In many countries most people never encounter ships and ports unless it’s to get on a ferry. This is probably true of NZ too despite its coastal layout and love of the sea.

This distance makes it difficult to build up a reservoir of good impressions on which to base any objective opinions whenever there is an accident or incident.

## Comms lessons

1) An Indian shipping ministry inquiry into the pollution of the river Karnaphuli due to leakage of oil from crude oil tanker *Banglar Shourabh* said in its report the extent of oil slick was not more than five tonnes. But a third party spread the news that several hundred tonnes of oil had leaked - causing river pollution and killing fish.

The report recommended that the authorities concerned should hold a press conference to give correct information to the media in cases of such incidents. Otherwise, people will get misleading information that could create panic. Two lessons here – the first is that the volume of a spill should always be double checked and not taken as read from the spiller. Secondly that media communications during a spill can be a two-way channel. Not only can information on the incident be given to media but they in turn can help the response by promoting information such as safety notices, compensation processes and volunteer recruitment.

2) How many of your regular audiences would understand and feel comforted by this statement in a crisis?

*"Of paramount importance during the oil-removal operation is the protection of the marine environment. To this end, both proactive and reactive environmental protection measures are in place."*

A spokesperson from South African authorities after the *BBC China* is wrecked off their coast.

3) Perception is reality:

Around 600 people have been killed by terrorist attacks this year in Afghanistan, a country of several million people, while the murder rate in Washington, a city of 500,000, is 300 a year. Why are the 600 deaths in Afghanistan a bigger crisis than 300 murders in Washington? Because the randomness and coverage of the deaths in Afghanistan means more people feel threatened by them.

During a crisis the more people affected or who feel threatened and the more serious the threat they feel - the more urgent the need to communicate to them what you're doing to fix the problem and make sure it doesn't happen again.

4) What do blog, electoral, peleton and defenestration have in common? - They're all part of Merriam-Webster's "10 words of the year."

You didn't know there were 10 words of the year? Neither did the rest of us until Merriam-Webster told us about them and they were reported in media across the world.

Merriam-Webster's list is an example of a company using its product or services (dictionaries) to create good news stories from information generated within its own business. With media 'silly season' coming up it could be a good chance to try something similar.

**Q**uotable quotes:

Character is not made in a crisis - it is only exhibited.

*American journalist Robert Freeman*

I fell over a kerb - it was just a coincidence the kerb was there and I'd had a beer or two!

*British boxer David Barnes recalls how he broke his elbow.*

**T**hanks for reading Issue two of The Good Oil. Have a safe and very merry festive season.

Cheers!

*Steve*

