

NASWI, Partner Agencies Conduct Oil Spill Drill

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OAK HARBOR, Wash. — U.S. Navy and Washington State Department of Ecology emergency response officials conducted an oil spill response exercise at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island's Seaplane Base in Oak Harbor, May 9.



OAK HARBOR, Wash. (May 9, 2013) Navy skimmers prepare to depart from a pier at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island's Seaplane Base for an oil spill exercise. The exercise was conducted with emergency response officials from the Navy and Washington State Department of Ecology to test the Navy's ability to respond to and manage an oil spill. No oil was actually discharged during the drill. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Joan E. Jennings/Released)

This large-scale exercise was designed to test the Navy's ability to respond to and manage a significant spill from a Navy facility, and is part of the Navy's commitment to protecting Puget Sound.

Stephanie Brown, Pollution Equipment Lifecycle Manager with Naval Seas Systems Command, said the drill is very beneficial to the Navy, the region and to the environment, and noted the collaboration among the different agencies was a key factor.

"We are working together in seeing each other's capabilities, sharing thoughts and lessons learned in procedures in spill response tactics," said Brown. "When you are facing an emergency response the team is able to come together," "With this drill we are learning how to communicate better with each other, and with practice we are better postured at the end of the day."

Response personnel from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island used small and medium boats and bright orange response booms to simulate oil cleanup from the harbor and Saratoga Passage, as well as protect the area's natural resources.



OAK HARBOR, Wash. (May 9, 2013) Emergency response officials from the Navy and Washington State Department of Ecology conduct an oil spill response exercise at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island's Seaplane Base. The exercise is designed to test the Navy's ability to respond to and manage a spill. No oil was actually discharged during the drill. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Joan E. Jennings/Released)

David Ulrich, Navy Region Northwest On-Scene Coordinator Program Manager said the Navy has an excellent spill abatement program, which means the agencies that participated rarely have a chance to exercise together.

"This drill is an excellent way to drill the region together and improve readiness," said Ulrich. "It's also a great partner opportunity. In an actual event this is the team that would come together and we would work in this very similar format."

The Navy routinely conducts response exercises such as this one to meet Washington State oil spill readiness requirements, improve coordination, communication and collaboration with other federal, state and local government agencies during environmental emergencies. Practicing responses in various situations enhances readiness among Navy installations to respond to actual oil spill incidents.

"There was a lot of planning and cooperation for this exercise, which is typical for an exercise this size," continued Ulrich. "In an actual event there would only be a few phone calls, with planning an exercise well we have been planning this since last July. It feels fantastic to see the plan come together."