

## Coast Guard cleaned up spill; now it will learn from it

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### Conferences are planned to use experience in Gulf to be ready for next time

**New London** - Now that oil is no longer gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, the commander of a local Coast Guard unit says it's time to figure out what worked best to contain and clean up the spill.

That's because there's always the possibility of another one.

"As long as we put parts in the ground to drill oil, this kind of event will happen," said Capt. Matthew J. Sisson, commanding officer of the Coast Guard Research and Development Center.

The research center and the International Ice Patrol, both based in New London, sent personnel to the Gulf after the April 20 explosion aboard Deepwater Horizon, a drilling rig working on a well for the oil company BP.

The center also collected more than 4,000 ideas from the general public, academia and private industry on how to best respond.

These papers, Sisson said, represent "significant intellectual capital that we need to now leverage."

"What we can't do is allow the information to grow stale or leach away so that another event in the future finds us reinventing the wheel," he said. "We've put in far too much effort to allow momentum to stall."

A conference will be held Thursday in New Orleans about the effectiveness of oil detection and collection techniques, which will be followed by a conference next month in New London on collecting submerged oil.

After the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989, the research center developed a method for concentrating and collecting oil so it can be ignited and burned while still on the surface of the ocean. That's known as in-situ, or in-place, burning.

At one point the Coast Guard used thousands of oranges to test the effectiveness of the technique because they would not pour oil into the ocean for an exercise, Sisson said. In the Gulf, in-situ burning was used to eliminate thousands of barrels of oil, he added.

Sisson said that after using the technique successfully, they will study it and try to refine it further.

Many samples of the oil from the Gulf were sent back to New London for forensic analysis at the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Laboratory.

So far, the lab has analyzed 735 samples as part of 209 cases, either from Deepwater Horizon or suspected to be from that spill.

Dr. Wayne R. Gronlund, manager of the lab, still expects occasional samples to arrive, but the pace at the lab has returned to normal following a busy July and August that will make it a record year for the number of cases.

The eight members of the International Ice Patrol, which shares a building with the center and lab at Fort Trumbull, have also returned to their normal routine after deploying to the Gulf.

Marine Science Technician Second Class Clifton Hendry spent a month soon after the spill flying over the area to look for oil and helping to plan where to place the booms to protect the shores. MST2 Will Moran worked on a boat skimming oil.

Lt. Cmdr. Gabrielle McGrath, deputy commanding officer of the unit,

shared her expertise about the nationwide incident command system with people there who had never dealt with a large spill.

As the deputy planning section chief for the Incident Command Post in Mobile, Ala., McGrath helped set up the response organization for the county branches throughout Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

Moran said they were all a "part of history."

"We were right at the source and experiencing things I will never see in my lifetime again hopefully, because it was such a devastating event," he said.

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