

Ecology to test oil spill readiness in Strait of Juan de Fuca

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) will be testing how well Harley Marine Services of Seattle can mount a rapid, aggressive and well-coordinated response to a simulated 34,000-gallon oil spill near the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca on August 1.

The Strait is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. A significant spill in the international waterway could have serious consequences to Washington's economy, environment and cultural resources.

No oil will be discharged during the large-scale equipment deployment exercise. Representatives from Ecology will observe and evaluate the planned drill near Neah Bay.

Harley Marine is sponsoring the multi-party oil-spill readiness drill with its contractor, Marine Spill Response Corp. MSRC is a private, non-profit spill response company supported by oil terminal and shipping company customers.

There also will be four oil tanker companies involved in the exercise:

- . Alaska Tanker Co.
- . BP Shipping
- . ConocoPhillips Polar Tankers
- . SeaRiver Maritime

MSRC will deploy oil-skimming vessels, response boats and oil barrier booms during the exercise. Local commercial fishing vessels and crews also will be safely integrated into the response as appropriate.

The drill is designed to test several geographic-based response plans designed to help reduce environmental damage if spill were to occur. This includes setting out boom to help prevent oil from entering the Waatch River.

Since state law requires companies have the capability to extend the hours of oil cleanup operations in darkness and poor visibility, MSRC will also deploy special tracking devices in the vicinity of the spill to help determine how and where the oil is located when visibility is low.

Washington law mandates that all oil tankers and oil barges, large commercial vessels, oil refineries, liquid fuel pipelines and oil-handling facilities that transfer high volumes of oil over water have spill readiness - or contingency - plans to operate in state waters. Oil spill contingency plans help ensure

companies are prepared to respond if they have a spill.

Since Harley Marine, Alaska Tanker Co., BP Shipping, ConocoPhillips Polar Tankers, and SeaRiver Maritime all regularly transport and transfer large volumes of oil over state waters, Ecology requires the companies to have spill contingency plans for their operations.

By participating in the drill, the five companies will fulfill part of Washington's oil-spill preparedness requirements.