

ABSTRACT

The history of judging spill response performance documents the early default criterion in the 1970s — remove visible oil — that evolved into ecologically based criteria in the 1980s — minimize spill impacts and protect environmentally sensitive areas. In the aftermath of the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* spill, more stakeholders and more criteria entered the spill response process in the 1990s.

Each stakeholder is concerned with receiving favorable media coverage, or at least minimizing negative coverage, and often views the media as final judges of response performance. The many stakeholders and their many, sometimes conflicting, criteria for judging response are examined, and factors that promote or impede response success are identified.

Recommendations are made to develop response goals and criteria acceptable to all stakeholders in advance of a spill incident. These criteria can then be used to develop contingency and response plans focused on achieving the goals and objectives of all stakeholders. Response performance can then be measured against those criteria either by the response community during exercises and routine responses or an independent panel in the aftermath of a major incident. These evaluations, using stakeholder criteria, can be returned to stakeholders for their consideration in either adjusting criteria that are proven impractical or revising plans to better meet the criteria. Recommendations are offered to foster debate and are aimed at establishing a standard mechanism for response performance measurement and ultimately improvement.