ABSTRACT

Training responders in a remote area on a new pipeline presented many challenges. Language barriers, cultural differences and remote locations required students and instructors to adapt both in the classroom and on equipment deployment exercises. This paper will illustrate issues and detail methods used to overcome initial differences in perception between instructors and students. It will also present field activities used to define responder qualification in an effort to standardize training and realize full potential.

The Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan Pipeline transports crude oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, crossing through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The Turkish section is 1076 kilometers (669 miles) long with four oil spill response depots located in the cities of Kars, Erzincan, Kayseri and Ceyhan. Each response depot is manned by Turkish Nationals. Spill responders were instructed at separate times by several different consultants with different backgrounds. A new pipeline with new spill responders coupled with a deadline for oil flow required both trainer and student to immediately adapt in order to prepare for a qualifying spill drill.

Responders at the Kars Response Depot were recruited from the local area and most spoke little if any English. The team had been exposed to different instructors and was very sensitive to changes in style and priorities. The language hurdle and past perceived expectations of responder qualification created a challenge in the classroom and slowed the delivery of spill response curriculum. Identifying an interpreter in the group helped to get some basic information delivered but could not convey important attitudes about spill response. Translating key elements of basic oil spill response into Turkish was an effective, if inefficient way to insure complete understanding but this was time consuming and there was not sufficient time prior to a tier three deployment drill to rewrite all the subjects. Conveying the critical importance of acceptance and flexible application of response decisions and tactics proved to be difficult in a classroom with a language barrier. Drawing pictures on a white board quickly became the classroom tool of choice.

Practical training proved to be a more effective means of transferring knowledge and attitudes in the art oil spill response. The Kars area of responsibility has the potential for an oil spill to impact more than one type of environment very quickly so it was important to teach efficient field incident command and stress the importance of breaking the incident down and prioritizing into manageable tasks. Field equipment deployments and area familiarization road trips were beneficial methods used to overcome initial differences in perception of expectations and test the new spill response plan. The hands on activities of loading equipment onto a truck, driving to a containment site, staging equipment and breaking into teams with task force leaders helped to clarify initial differences in expectations that occurred in the classroom. A sense of ownership was created for the responders when they tested accessibility of preplanned containment sites and used their local knowledge to find better options that would allow the team to stay ahead of a spill. Measuring specific data such as stream flow rates and depths, response times, GPS coordinates, route plans, managing security and updating the response data base gave the team confidence in their area of operation and promoted thought on different response tactics.

Getting to know responders also proved to help create ownership of their area of operation and the response plan. Interviewing responders and aligning their previous vocational strengths with those key to an oil spill response team was instrumental in maintaining confidence levels and promoting team building. Upon going through the process of preparing and successfully deploying people and equipment for a spill drill the responders realized the point of their hard work was protecting the public and environment. They also saw how fostering a healthy relationship with the government aided in their ability to control, organize and manage incident response operations. When the crew felt they owned the response depot, equipment and area of operation they quickly crossed over from their previous jobs and developed into confident responders.

BIOGRAPHY

Patrick Cosgrove started his spill response career at a U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in 1994. After leaving the Coast Guard, he worked as a Vessel Superintendent for a Stevedore company, then a Marine Response Supervisor for National Response Corporation/Seacor Environmental Services. Seacor employed him as Superintendent of the Kars, Turkey Response Depot, along the BTC pipeline in 2005. He currently works as a Training Specialist for Alaska Clean Seas.