



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

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FACT SHEET

Date: August 28, 2008

Report: 2008-102

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Office of Spill Prevention and Response

It Has Met Many of Its Oversight and Response Duties, but Interaction With Local Government, the Media, and Volunteers Needs Improvement

BACKGROUND

Marine oil spills, such as the November 2007 oil spill resulting when an outbound container ship—the Cosco Busan—hit a support on the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge and released 53,600 gallons of oil into the bay, are multijurisdictional events and typically require a coordinated response by federal, state, and private entities. The Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (spill office), along with contingency plans it oversees, fits into a national framework for preventing and responding to oil spills, with entities at every level of government, as well as private entities, handling some aspect of the planning effort. Thus, a three-part unified command consisting of representatives from the spill office, the party responsible for the spill, and the U.S. Coast Guard responded to the Cosco Busan oil spill.

KEY FINDINGS

Our review of the planning, oversight, and administrative activities of the spill office and the coordinated response of the spill office, Office of Emergency Services (Emergency Services), and private entities to the Cosco Busan oil spill in the San Francisco Bay, revealed the following:

- The spill office maintains a state plan for responding to oil spills, but it has not updated the plan since 2001. Moreover, the plan is missing required elements and does not contain references to regional and area contingency planning documents that contain those elements.
- Few local governments participate in oil spill contingency planning activities. While 21 counties and one city with marine waters have oil spill contingency plans, 10 plans have not been updated for 10 to 15 years. Further, local governments have attended few oil spill response drills or planning meetings over the last few years.
- Although the spill office, Emergency Services, and private entities responding to the Cosco Busan oil spill met their fundamental responsibilities, there were weaknesses in the spill office's immediate response efforts.
 - A shortage of communications equipment during the critical second and third days limited communication efforts.
 - Lack of trained liaison officers and public information officers experienced in oil spill response during the early days of the response hindered the spill office's efforts to communicate specific and timely information with local governments and volunteers.
 - The spill office's lack of urgency in reporting its measurement of the oil spill quantity, as well as understated spill amounts reported by others, may have delayed deployment of additional resources and notification of local governments.
- We found several instances in which certain staff performed activities unrelated to oil spill prevention, yet were paid almost entirely from fees assessed for the Oil Spill Prevention and Administration Fund.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made numerous recommendations in our report including that the spill office update the state plan and incorporate references to the regional and area contingency plans. Moreover, we recommended the spill office work with local governments to improve participation and better integrate local plans with the response activities on an up-to-date basis. Further, the spill office should ensure it has adequate procedures and a sufficient number of trained staff for all activities including performing liaison duties, spill volume calculations, and other recovery activities. Additionally, the spill office should ensure the proper use of its funds earmarked for oil spill prevention activities.

