
Central Texas Coastal Area Contingency Plan (CTCACP)

Tarball Response Plan

Annex II

August 2026

Record of Changes

Change Number	Change Description	Part Number	Change Date	Name
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1000 Introduction to the Central Texas Tarball Response Plan

The Central Texas shoreline frequently experiences oil washing onshore in the form of tar balls, particularly during the summer months, due to temperature, current, and tidal influences. A tar ball is a clump, blob, or mat of petroleum that has been carried by ocean currents, picking up solids and weathering with exposure to environmental elements along the way. With over 600 known oil seeps in the Gulf of America, tar balls may occur naturally, or they may be associated with a man-made source such as an oil spill. Tar ball events are not normally particularly hazardous to humans, but they often generate a high degree of economic and environmental concerns. They can generate considerable media coverage with questions usually related to the origin of the tar balls and whether they are associated with a known source or event. The planning, clean-up, and disposal associated with a coastal tar ball event may require extensive federal, state, and local coordination to return the Gulf of America shoreline to its former state. Minimizing impacts to wildlife, vegetation, and other natural resources are the key objectives for any oil spill response effort.

Objectives:

- To ensure the highest state of readiness for tar ball clean-up for the protection and preservation of the marine environment of the Central Texas Coastal Zone.
- To facilitate the most efficient and effective response while minimizing social, political, economic, and environmental impacts.

2000 Initial Phase

2100 Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Teams (SCAT) and Rapid Assessment Teams (RAT)

Shoreline Cleanup Assessment is a process, utilizing standard terminology, to collect data on shoreline oiling conditions and support decision-making for shoreline clean-up. SCAT should be conducted in accordance with the NOAA Shoreline Assessment Manual (3rd edition).

A Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Team (SCAT) is composed of multi-agency representation. Each team should, at a minimum, consist of a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) member and one Texas General Land Office (TGLO) response officer.

A SCAT, at a minimum, should determine the following: Is cleanup necessary? Which cleanup method is most appropriate? What is the cleanup priority at the site? Which constraints are necessary to protect sensitive resources? Should cleanup operations be terminated at the site? The Field Observer Form for Quick Shoreline Assessment form (see Addendum B) may be used for rapid shoreline assessment. Rapid Assessment is the most effective means of quickly determining shoreline cleanup requirements. Rapid Assessment is a modified SCAT process; similar, yet less in-depth, tactics are employed to collect data necessary to employ cleanup.

A Rapid Assessment Team (RAT) is composed of one or more rapidly deployed SCAT trained individuals from the USCG, TGLO, or other governmental or private entity whose purpose is to

acquire percent coverage of tar ball impacts from affected areas and report back to command, who will determine where immediate deployment of cleanup crews will be sent.

To determine equipment needed, review the equipment list in the Shoreline Assessment Manual. Cameras with GPS capabilities are ideal for documenting pollution. A few additional considerations: 4x4 Pickups, UTVs, ATVs, SCAT packs, TGLO Field Observer Form for Quick Shoreline Assessment forms, and communication gear (location dependent).

2200 Natural Resources Considerations

Potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources should be handled on a case-by-case basis and include coordination with, at a minimum, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD). Recovery operations should include potential habitat impacts and seasonal distribution of fish and wildlife resources in relation to cleanup strategies (manual and/or mechanical). Sea turtle and marine mammal considerations are explained in the Oiled Wildlife Response Plan of the Area Contingency Plan. This includes contact information for the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) and the Marine Mammal Stranding Network (MMSN) to coordinate responses to stranding events. This section also provides guidance for beach transit during sea turtle nesting season (April through August).

The beaches along the mid to lower Texas coast range in composition from fine grained sand to shell hash. Efforts to reduce the volume of beach material removed during tar recovery operations should be exercised and include coordination with, at a minimum, the landowners and/or municipalities of the impacted area and the Texas General Land Office (TGLO). Special consideration ought to include areas where erosion exceeds accretion and beach nourishment projects have occurred. See TGLO Oils Spill Atlas (ESI Maps) and Site-Specific Response Plans for further planning and operations considerations. High public usage of the beaches in the Central Texas Coastal Zone requires rapid tar ball removal and a high degree of shoreline cleanliness.

3000 Initiation of Action

3100 Requests for Resources

Response efforts may require resources outside the regular unit capabilities. Potential additional resources necessary for tar ball recovery may include:

- District Response Advisory Team
- Gulf Strike Team
- Houston Public Affairs Detachment or National Strike Force Coordination Center Public Information Assist Team
- NOAA & State Scientific Support Coordinators
- National Spill Control School
- Regional Liaison Officer

3200 Staging Areas

Potential staging areas which may be considered during tar ball events should be evaluated geographically.

4000 Cleanup and Recovery Phase

4100 Shoreline Cleanup

4110 Manual Tar Ball Removal

Manual tar ball Removal involves the usage of hand tools such as shovels, rakes, pitchforks, and polypropylene drum liners. Manual removal is best for minimizing the volume of sand removed from the shoreline, therefore requiring less disposal.

4120 Mechanical Tar Ball Removal

Mechanical tar ball removal involves the use of heavy equipment such as backhoes, excavators, bulldozers, and graders. Tar balls may be loaded into end-dumps, roll-off boxes, or other methods for disposal. Care should be taken to remove as little sediment as possible.

4130 Endpoint Recommendation

Shoreline recovery endpoint consideration should be the removal of visible oil to background concentrations.

4200 Finances

4210 Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF)

Fund uses were delineated by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) to include:

- Removal costs incurred by the Coast Guard and EPA
- State access for removal activities
- Payments to federal, state, and Indian tribe trustees to conduct natural resource damage assessments and restorations
- Payment of claims for uncompensated removal costs and damages
- Research and development
- Other specific appropriations

The OSLTF has two major components. 1) The Emergency Fund is available for Federal On-Scene Coordinators (FOSCs) to respond to discharges and for federal trustees to initiate natural resource damage assessments. The Emergency Fund is a recurring \$50 million available to the President annually. 2) The remaining Principal Fund balance is used to pay claims and to fund appropriations by Congress to Federal agencies to administer the provisions of OPA and support research and development.

Access to the OSLTF is achieved in accordance with the NPFC User Reference Guide (eURG) which is designed to be a reference tool during an oil or hazardous materials spill incident for Coast Guard and EPA Federal On-Scene Coordinators. Most NPFC publications that deal with financial management aspects of oil spill response are included in this document.

4220 National Pollution Funds Center

The U.S. Coast Guard's National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC) was created to implement Title I of the Oil Pollution Act (OPA), which addressed issues associated with preventing, responding to, and paying for oil pollution. Title I of OPA established oil spill liability and compensation

requirements, including the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF) to pay for expeditious oil removal and uncompensated damages.

4230 Responsible Party

The responsible party (RP) of an incident is the person, business, or entity that has been identified as owning the vessel or facility that caused the spill. The term does not imply criminal negligence. Not all incidents have a designated responsible party; these spills are called mystery spills. Frequently, when tarballs wash ashore in Central Texas, no RP can be identified. However, if the incident does have an RP, in almost all cases, claims must first be submitted to the RP before it can be submitted to the government (OSLTF, NPFC).

4240 Claims Reporting

To submit a claim, the claimant must show that the spill meets all OPA 90 requirements. The claims manager cannot process the claims package until it has been proven that the spill meets these requirements (The OPA Claims Requirements checklist provides a step-by-step guide to help you decide if a spill qualifies). Costs and damages from the spill must be documented. Claims packages must be forwarded to the National Pollution Funds Center, the Coast Guard office responsible for evaluating and approving OPA claims.

For further information, visit the NPFC website: <http://www.uscg.mil/npfc/>