

U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**United States  
Coast Guard**



Commandant  
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Staff Symbol:  
Phone:

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U.S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN ROBERT MASON

ON GREAT LAKES OIL SPILLS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

21 SEPTEMBER 1990



CAPTAIN ROBERT W. MASON  
CHIEF, MARINE SAFETY DIVISION  
NINTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT

Captain Robert W. Mason is a 1965 graduate of the U. S. Coast Guard Academy. During his service time, he has served aboard three Coast Guard vessels; the USCGC MATAGORDA, the USCGC PONTCHARTRAIN and the USCGC SHERMAN, in both deck and engineering assignments. Captain Mason is a qualified marine inspector, both deck and engineering, and has served in marine safety tours in the Marine Safety Office Los Angeles/Long Beach; the Merchant Marine Technical Office, Ninth Coast Guard District, Cleveland, Ohio, and three tours in the Office of Merchant Marine Safety in Washington, DC. Captain Mason earned a Masters Degree in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering from the University of Michigan between tours. He was assigned to the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in Galveston, Texas in 1984, as the Executive Officer, and was reassigned in 1986, as the Commanding Officer. In those positions, he was the federal on-scene coordinator for over 2000 oil and chemical spills, including the over 10 million gallon spill from the M/V ALVENUS in 1984. He is presently assigned as the Chief, Marine Safety Division, Ninth Coast Guard District in Cleveland, Ohio, where he is responsible for the supervision of all marine safety activities, including pollution response, for all U.S. Coast Guard facilities in the Great Lakes Region.

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GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE.  
I AM CAPTAIN BOB MASON, CHIEF OF MARINE SAFETY FOR THE NINTH  
COAST GUARD DISTRICT. AMONG OTHER DUTIES, I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR  
MANAGEMENT OF THE COAST GUARD'S MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
PROGRAM IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION. I AM CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE  
REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM FOR STANDARD FEDERAL REGION FIVE.

I APPRECIATE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY ON BEHALF OF THE  
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD REGARDING THE OIL POLLUTION ACT OF  
1990.

SUBSEQUENT TO THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL IN MARCH OF 1989,  
TREMENDOUS CONCERNS FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT HAVE DEVELOPED. EARLIER  
THIS YEAR, BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS UNANIMOUSLY PASSED LEGISLATION  
INTENDED TO ADDRESS OIL POLLUTION IN PARTICULAR. THIS  
LEGISLATION TOOK MORE THAN A YEAR TO COMPLETE. THAT LONG PERIOD  
OF TIME WAS CERTAINLY NOT DUE TO A LACK OF INTEREST. IT  
REFLECTED THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUES AND PROBLEMS WHICH ARE  
INVOLVED.

THE COAST GUARD ANTICIPATES PRESIDENTIAL SIGNATURE OF CORRESPONDING EXECUTIVE ORDERS WHICH WILL TASK VARIOUS FEDERAL AGENCIES WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT. FOR MY SERVICE, THIS WILL BE A DIFFICULT, CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENT, MADE EVEN MORE REMARKABLE BY ITS SCOPE, MULTIFACETED OBJECTIVES, AND TRULY DEMANDING TIMELINE. THE NECESSARY REGULATIONS, THREAT ASSESSMENTS, CONTINGENCY PLANNING, AND EQUIPMENT ACQUISITION AND DEPLOYMENT WILL REQUIRE INTERACTION WITH ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS, AND THE PUBLIC. THIS IS A PROCESS THAT MUST CAREFULLY WEIGH LOCAL INPUT WITH OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GENUINE ENVIRONMENTAL RISK.

THE COAST GUARD WILL PREPOSITION POLLUTION RESPONSE EQUIPMENT IN VARIOUS REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY. DEPLOYMENT OF THIS EQUIPMENT WILL BE PREDICATED ON THE LEVEL OF FUTURE CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS. SHOULD APPROPRIATIONS FALL SHORT OF THE TARGET, TOUGH DECISIONS WILL BE MADE REGARDING THE PLACEMENT OF THIS EQUIPMENT. EQUIPMENT SITES WILL BE BASED ON THE POTENTIAL POLLUTION THREAT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY OF THE REGION. TO THE EXTENT THE GREAT LAKES ARE VIEWED AS BEING VULNERABLE TO OIL SPILLS, EQUIPMENT MAY BE ALLOCATED TO FACILITATE A RAPID RESPONSE TO THE ENTIRE GREAT LAKES BASIN.

THE ACTUAL LOCATION FOR PREPLACEMENT OF FEDERAL OIL SPILL RESPONSE EQUIPMENT WITHIN A GENERAL AREA WILL BE BASED ON SEVERAL FACTORS INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO: SUITABLE STORAGE FACILITIES; ACCESS TO AIR, LAND, AND WATER TRANSPORTATION ROUTES; AND EXISTING INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION RESPONSE RESOURCES. THERE ARE NUMEROUS FACTORS THAT WILL BE EVALUATED BEFORE A FINAL DECISION IS MADE.

THE OIL POLLUTION ACT OF 1990 REQUIRES THOSE COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION OF OIL TO DEVELOP RESPONSE PLANS FOR WORST CASE OIL SPILLS. IT ALSO REQUIRES THAT THEY HAVE EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT THESE PLANS. TO MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS, WE FORESEE A SIGNIFICANT EXPANSION OF POLLUTION RESPONSE CAPABILITIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL SPILL RESPONSE COOPERATIVES. THE PRIVATE SECTOR SHARES RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VIABLE POLLUTION RESPONSE CAPABILITY.

FEDERAL AREA CONTINGENCY PLANS WILL BE UPDATED AS REQUIRED BY THE ACT. AREA RESPONSE COMMITTEES WILL BE FORMED FROM QUALIFIED PERSONNEL OF FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES, APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT. THE COMMITTEE WILL OPERATE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR FOR THE AREA. EACH COMMITTEE WILL DEVELOP AN AREA CONTINGENCY PLAN ADEQUATE TO: REMOVE A WORST CASE DISCHARGE; INVESTIGATE OR PREVENT A

SUBSTANTIAL THREAT OF SUCH DISCHARGE; AND PRE-PLAN JOINT RESPONSE EFFORTS. THE PROCESS OF MAKING MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS FOR AREA COMMITTEES HAS NOT YET BEGUN. HOWEVER, COAST GUARD FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATORS WOULD WELCOME THE NAMES AND PARTICULARS OF PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES.

THE OIL POLLUTION ACT OF 1990 IS AN IMPORTANT, COMPLEX LAW. IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTION, CONTINGENCY PLANNING, AND RESPONSE ELEMENTS, CALLED FOR BY THE ACT, REPRESENT ONLY A PART OF THE COAST GUARD'S TASKING. EXECUTIVE DELEGATIONS AND CONGRESSIONAL FUNDING IN THE FY1991 BUDGET ARE ALSO IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THIS ENDEAVOR. THE ACQUISITION AND DEPLOYMENT OF POLLUTION RESPONSE CAPABILITIES ARE ESSENTIAL TO FEDERAL PREPAREDNESS. HOWEVER, THE CRITICAL ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIVATE INDUSTRY IN DEVELOPING A PRIMARY RESPONSE CAPABILITY CANNOT BE OVERSTATED.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THIS CONCLUDES MY STATEMENT. I WILL BE GLAD TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU OR THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE MAY HAVE.