

**Interview Summary Form****Interview Details**

Interviewee Name:	<u>Richard Harrell</u>	Date:	<u>9/15/10</u>	Time:	<u>10:00am</u>
Interviewee Title:	<u>Mississippi SOSC</u>	Interviewee Job Location:	<u>Mobile, AL</u>		
Interviewer Name(s):	<u>Greg Pollack</u>	Interview Location:	<u>PHONE</u>		
	<u>Barbara Parker</u>				

**Notes****Describe your regular, pre-incident job duties and also your specific role during the DWH incident.**

- My day job is that I am an engineer with Mississippi's (MS) Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). I serve as the Chief of the Management Support Branch. I also work a lot with DEQ's Emergency Response Branch. I was the State lead during the Katrina response operations. For the last 6-8 years, I have been the #1 or #2 person involved with all large environmental response operations within MS.
- Starting about May 1, I was the primary MS SOSC. I served in Mobile at the Sector Mobile ICP. I have been involved in the day to day operations (in two weeks on, one week off rotation) ever since.
- I am still active in Mobile (though not this week).
- On September 20<sup>th</sup>, all activities at the Sector Mobile ICP will transition to the UAC in NOLA. At that time, I will transition control over to the person responsible for natural resource damage assessments (NRDA) within MS. Since there is no recoverable oil left, we are transitioning into a long-term project management phase.

**What is your understanding of, and the familiarity with, all the response plans at the State and Local levels within MS? Were those plans used during the response?**

- The ACP was definitely used, especially for identifying critical habitats, places of interest and other key areas. The ACP was adequate and utilized.
- There is a deficiency with the One Gulf Plan. That plan never assumed that an event this large would occur and that it could affect all five Gulf States at one time. In addition, operational parts of that plan (e.g., related to skimmers, etc.) are deficient.
- I did not have any involvement/input in creation of the ACP. Eric Dear, Chief of Emergency Services did, as did the MS Department of Marine Resources and the local MS governments. The first time I actually used the ACP was during the DWH response operations.
- I never attended Area Committee meetings. Other DEQ staff did, although I probably will in the future.
- One issue I had with the ACP was that before Katrina, MS was split between Sectors New Orleans (Hancock County) & Mobile (Harrison & Jackson Counties). During Katrina, those AORs were changed (because Sector New Orleans was too busy with operations within LA) so that all MS counties were within the AOR of Sector Mobile. This became official policy after Katrina. However, even though this was changed, the ACPs were not completely modified to reflect the fact that Hancock County was now within the jurisdiction of Sector Mobile. For example, most of the maps in the Mobile ACP did not include Hancock County. This was a big headache that we had to work through. All counties within a state need to be with a single USCG Sector's AOR. It would have been a huge problem during this response if MS was divided between two separate sectors. From MS's perspective all counties should be covered by one USCG sector. The locals did not realize the significance of the ACP.

**Did you feel like you were included in the Unified Command and that your voice was heard?**

- Yes, definitely. BP, USCG, and the affected states worked closely and effectively together in Unified Command.
- It felt like we were being listened to; states provided input and comments as needed. At no time were we ever overruled. There were negotiations sometimes, but that was a straightforward process.

**Was there good coordination between the Mobile ICP and the UAC in Robert (and later NOLA)? Were there frequent communications between the Mobile ICP and the UAC?**

- At first, it was not as good as it should have been. The UAC is tasked with strategic resourcing. It seemed like the UAC did not have a good understanding of what resources were available, where they were coming from, how they were being allocated, and what were the needs of the ICPs. It got better as time went along, but towards the end, the UAC seemed disconnected from Mobile. This “step back” was probably because of transition plan problems. The Mobile ICP was ready to transition, had plans in place, were ready to go, etc. but the UAC was two weeks behind us.
- Early on, the Mobile ICP had conference calls twice a day with the UAC. All of the OSCs from the States, USCG and BP were on those calls. Now there is only one a day.
- *Deficiency.* The State of MS should have sent a person from MS to the UAC earlier on in the response to ensure consistent information flow. This was a manpower issue at first. Everything got better once we put someone over there. We sent someone in mid-June.
- Staffing was always a challenge for us, especially at the highest levels of our response organization. Everyone had general ICS knowledge, but not necessary detailed environmental response/oil spill response knowledge, but we worked through it.

**Did you ever consider the use of EMAC to bring in additional individuals to help backfill some positions?**

- We considered EMAC for certain pieces, but where it would have been best utilized, we already had enough staff (i.e., middle management). At the senior level, where we needed help, we were not comfortable bringing in someone using EMAC because those individuals wouldn't have had enough background information on specific MS issues, politics, etc. to have been of much use.

**Were all MS State personnel familiar with ICS? Were they easily integrated into the ICS response organization? How about locals-were they integrated into the ICS response structure in any way?**

- DEQ is comfortable with ICS. Our Department of Marine Resources, however, does not have people trained on ICS, so it was more difficult for those individuals to plug in. DEQ had some issues related to ICS training as well. We were, however, able to quickly get people up to speed.
- As a whole, locals understand ICS better than most people at the state level because they use it all the time. The problem locals (i.e., cities and counties) struggled with the most was understanding OPA90 and how it differed from the Stafford Act. Those folks are used to responding under the Stafford Act construct. Stafford is structured differently (i.e., from the bottom->up) compared to OPA90 which is structured from the top->down.
- Our biggest challenge was managing the expectations of what their role is and what they could and should do versus what the state, federal and RP roles are/were.
- The locals thought their role was to go and do the cleanup (i.e., hire contractors) just like they did after Katrina. It was a huge undertaking to convince them the NCP system works.
- Once they understood the concept, we invited local EMAs to send staff to the ICP and participate and see what was going on. Once they saw and heard what was going on, it seemed to settle them down.

**Did the MS Governor grasp the inherent differences of OPA/NCP vs. the Stafford Act?**

- He understood it and tried to relate to it. Most of the time he went through us. Early on, I had daily calls with the Governor, his liaison and the State EOC. The Governor's liaison was actively involved. He set up a state EOC in Biloxi to deal with local issues.
- The Governor tried to go through the proper ICS channels and avoid making tactical decisions. However, he did push through tactical decisions related to increasing the numbers of boat on the water and the skimming capacity. In a sense, he worked issues from both sides. He had me push the state's priorities through the UC while he worked the same issues through political channels.

**What are your thoughts about the VOO program?**

- It could have been a good program, but overall it was not overly helpful. Initially, we had about 100 doing sentinel duty.

But then there was a lot of political pressure to hire a bunch of VOOs (700) within a few weeks. BP and USCG honored the request, but it was severely lacking in direction and organizational control from the very beginning. All these VOOs, once hired, were not told what to do, there was no hierarchy to oversee them, and in general there was no command and control. At the state level, we tried to activate State National Guard resources and involve them to help better control all these ships. By the time we finally got that in place and it was becoming an effective program, there was no more recoverable oil. I think a lesson we learned is that you can't activate all these vessels unless they have specific taskings, clear span of control, an established organizational structure and effective communications.

- VOOs were not effective in recovering oil. That said, the VOOs used as Sentinel duty boats were effective. They were also effective serving as water shuttles (i.e., ferrying individuals out to collect samples and assist oiled wildlife, etc.)
- The VOO program was simply ramped up too fast (likely because of political pressure-they wanted to see boats on water, people working, something happening). This pressure came from all over—local, state, federal cabinet level and the President.
- There are about 5-10 VOOs still operating in MS doing sampling, ferrying wildlife teams etc.

**How was information flow within the Mobile ICP? Could you get the information you needed in a timely fashion?**

- For the most part, I was able to get the information I needed from the Ops/Planning sections. Usually you would go to the Situation Unit, but early on, if we needed information, we would hunt down the specific person or go directly to a specific area for the information we needed. We were unable to get it from the Situation Unit. As the incident progressed, reports and briefing improved a lot so that eventually we got close to 99% of what we needed from those briefings/calls and the Situation Unit
- Part of the reason the Situation Unit was a problem was because of issues related to personnel rotations. Personnel rotations varied greatly. Every organization in the ICP seemingly had their own rotation schedule. Some did better on having personnel overlap during the transition period. Once a person finally got the process down, they would rotate out. We would basically start over each time a new personnel rotation started. This continual re-inventing of the wheel with different people was frustrating.

**How involved were you in the RRT Dispersants approval process, if at all? Do you know if MS was consulted on the use of dispersants and/or in situ burning?**

- Eric Dear is the state RRT member.
- I don't think the state had any objections related to dispersant and in situ burning use in federal waters, but it didn't seem like we were consulted much on it.
- All dispersant issues were run out of Houma.
- Even though dispersants were not approved or used in Sector Mobile, dispersant operations were flown out of Hancock County, Mississippi. This created an issue because the locals would see dispersants loaded onto a plane and flown out of MS and it was very difficult to convince them that it wasn't going to be used in MS. At first, the State wasn't even aware that dispersant operations were being flown out of MS. Had we known, it would have allowed us to have been proactive instead of reactive in our messaging.

**From your perspective, what went well?**

- Overall, the UC process in Mobile went very well. MS felt like they were plugged in and had input. We participated in all aspects. A lot of this is due to two individuals: CAPT Poulan (FOSC) and Keith (BP) did a good job in ensuring we were included.
- Overall, the response went well. There were some growing pains, but in general the process seemed to work.

**From your perspective, what didn't go well?**

- Communications back to local officials early on was severely lacking. They had ramped up and activated their EOCs and were out there trying to do things, but there wasn't a good mechanism to feed them information on what was going on. They needed this information to alleviate local fears. We needed to get information out faster and better.
- It took a long time to get to this point, but eventually we got some USCG, BP & State LNOs down at EOC level to liaise at that level. Having these liaison officers is a really big lesson learned-it helped a lot. Eventually, we also invited them to

send a rep over to the Mobile ICP. Even though they weren't involved in decision-making process, they were able to be situationally aware of what was going on and pass information back to their EOC/Mayor/Board of Supervisors.

- In the OPA90 law, there needs to be direct funding to local EOCs so they clearly understand what they do, what funding allowed, etc.
- The management of expectations. We failed to adequately explain what was going on, what responders were doing, what the VOOs are supposed to do. For example, there were false expectations developed by the VOO Program. Five thousand people were signed up and we never would have used that many. Another example: we had lots of volunteers signed up to assist with beach cleanup, but then they had to go back and tell them they couldn't use them because of OSHA & HAZWOPER requirements. It created distrust and disappointment in how things were working.

**Is there anyone else we should talk to?**

Eric Dear

Barbara Viskup (MS biologist)

The three MS County EMA directors.