

Interview Summary Form**Interview Details**

Interviewee Name: Phil Woods Date: 9/14/10 Time: 1:00pm

Interviewee Title: Alabama SOSC Interviewee Job Location: Montgomery, AL
Greg Pollack Interview Location: PHONE
 Interviewer Name(s): Barbara Parker

Notes**What were your jobs/roles/responsibilities within the State during the DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident?**

- I was the AL SOSC. Though we never called it an ESF10 event, we treated it similarly since in the state of Alabama the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has the lead role for any hazmat/oil event. I naturally fell into the SOSC role.
- Started working on way back from Tampa at the Clean Gulf meeting.

Since a Stafford Act Declaration was never made by the President, can you explain what you mean by ESF10 event?

- It was a hazardous materials event, which meet the definition of an ESF10, but never officially called it, as there was not a Stafford Act declaration.
- All of the same players were there, but we ran the response without federal money.

Did you served in this position since day 1 of the response?

- Yes. We did have a new director of ADEM, and he issued a new memo saying that someone else will be in charge, I said fine, but got a call 2 days later and told to get back and resume my duties.
- If was probably because I speak my mind. I maintained all along that it was spilled oil, and that we could deal with it, regardless of the quantity. Politicians were of the frame of mind that it would be Armageddon if any oil reached the beaches/coastline.

How familiar were individuals at County/Governor level with the NCP?

- Not at all. Governor did not know that DEM did anything related to oil spills and was not even familiar with the AL Emergency Operations Plan.
- I had to brief the Governor on an airplane when flying out to the rig with Capt Poulin and Capt Stanton.

Were you involved in the development of the Mobile Sector ACP?

- Yes, I was part of the development of the digital ACP, along with other state and local agencies and the Coast Guard. We helped to augment and ground truth applicable parts.
- This was a subcommittee of the Area Committee. Worked with then LT Drew Casey and he did an excellent job in my opinion.

How often does Area Committee meet?

- It is about every 6 months. It is a pretty active group and works real well.

Is anyone responsible for meeting minutes?

- Could not answer – I assume they are.

Was the ACP used for this response? And does the ACP show ESAs?

- Yes, used the ACP as a great resource. Never anticipated that much oil spilled in the Gulf, but it provides all the pertinent info so that even someone not familiar with the plan could come in and understand the local area.
- Alabama's Emergency Management Agency was involved, but not as much as ADEM. Do not recall any political involvement. Other state and federal agencies were involved as were some of the city/county departments of emergency managements.
- Yes, we had a relatively new ESA that is as up to date as it could have been at the time. It included a new environmentally sensitive index. This was followed closely during the response to the DWH event. We used the recommendations in the plan across the AL coastline and followed the identified priorities in that document.
- The areas that we immediately boomed followed the assigned priorities in the ACP.

Was the placement of boom influenced by politics?

- For some reason the politicians had unreasonable expectations of the boom. We tried to explain the purpose of containment boom, but they never understood. Governor wanted to close off Mobile Bay and Perdido Pass. Eventually, we had to show them that this wasn't possible and we showed them that this would not work. I think we snapped 5 piers immediately in Mobile Bay when trying to implement the plan – the hydraulic force of the bay could not be stopped. Ended up putting in \$5M system that I don't think did anything to stop oil from following into the bay, in my opinion.
- Even after we demonstrated that the idea to boom these places was impossible, the Governor never even acknowledged that it was a failed plan from the beginning.

Did you get any tarballs in Mobile Bay?

- Heard reports, but do not have any record of them hitting the shore. Lots of reports were never substantiated. We maintained it would take a hurricane to push the oil or tarballs into Mobile Bay. It is a lot of water following out of the bay – it is equivalent to the flow of the Mississippi River.
- We even had to place boom along the causeway – 30 miles upstream.

Was the Governor intimately involved with tactical equipment deployment decision making?

- Yes, I met with Governor at least every other day.
- More than once I tried to talk some sense to him.
- The Governor was very hands on-he was always getting out to look at things. He was active, but not always in a good way.

Was it a significant impairment to the response that there were people not aware of the NCP?

- Yes. Understand where the politicians were coming from and the demands of their positions, but when it comes to an event like this, they needed to let the responders do their jobs. Responders should not be directed how to respond by people not familiar with the plans and processes.

During the response, did you feel like you were a part of the UC at the Mobile ICP? Did you have an equal voice?

- Yes. We managed to work around the obstacles that came up so that we could take care of the task at hand.
- Always felt like I was being listened to when I had an opinion, never felt slighted. They always treated me as an equal

Did you have any involvement at the Area Command level?

- Only in conference calls, never direct contact.
- Our former Director, Mr. John Hagan, was at the Area Command for a while, although he had never been around response activities before. Our new director was not scheduled to take over until July, but took over in the first part of June.
- This was supposed to be my job.

Did you feel that you had enough staff to do the work?

- Yes, we had plenty of resources within ADEM to call on.

How well versed were those representing the state or involved in the response with NIMS/ICS?

- That is a hard one. I was championing the charge that you could not be involved in the ICP unless you had the ICS 100/ 200 and the FEMA EMI Individual Study 700/800 courses. That idea was shot down. Most political appointees or politicians did not understand ICS or even know what it stood for.

Can you describe Information flow?

- We quickly learned early not to trust any numbers. Too many hands in the pot. Never really got a clear answer.
- The Mobile ICP Situation Unit never really filled their role. We were hurting in the Situation Unit and JIC area too.
- Because they had such a disjointed picture of the response, I would go to Operations or Logistics Sections to get a better handle on what was happening. This was in the early weeks – it has gotten a lot better since.
- It was frustrating at the time. It was because we allowed BP such free reign, but they had good resources and deep pockets. It appeared that they had more authority than they should have had. Would have preferred that USCG be the lead from Day 1.

What was your perception of how the JIC was functioning?

- It was very dynamic. Every time you got used to somebody, there was someone new filling that spot. This was with all parties, straight across the board (with the exception of USCG Capt Poulin and Drelling). There was

constant turnover

Were the right people, equipment identified? Any involvement in the VOO program?

- Early on it was, but later in the response they replaced some of the contractors we typically work with with some that I was not familiar with. I am not sure why this happened.
- I did not work with the VOO program, but I do know that VOOs did play a key and necessary role. We would have been in trouble without them.
- When the oil was coming ashore, were able to head it off before it hit all of the beaches. Was not impressed with their boom deployment – you really need excessive training before conducting a booming placement operations – but they were good for skimming operations.

Were you involved in the use of dispersants? Any RRT involvement? Included in subsea dispersants conversations?

- There was a conversation, but we knew that the State was not going to apply dispersants within our waters. We were in agreement, however, with doing it outside the 3-mile zone. Same with in-situ burning.
- Discussions of dispersants went up through the RRT.
- Application of subsurface dispersants was made at a higher level, but if I was asked to vote, I would have said yes. I am typically against dispersant use, but the political involvement of this event, agree with their use.

What was the involvement of Counties and Cities in the response organization? What was their role?

- Only 2 counties involved (Mobile and Baldwin), but the County and City level was active.
- They also tried to direct resources – even to this day. We tried to ignore them. Message has been same from the beginning, it is just oil, we will get through this.
- Everyone wants their piece of the pie (i.e., money from BP). BP has given the state \$50M that I am aware of. BP has been bending over backwards from the beginning as far as I am familiar with. Their viewpoint from the beginning: “Too many resources is not enough.”
- Money was dispersed down to the county level – Mobile and Baldwin. I was asked if we wanted any of it, but we are not set up for that, so I directed it to our Department of Emergency Management and to the counties. We had no involvement in how the money was used.

Do you think that BP damaged the whole concept of UC by giving funds directly to the States?

- No.
- Actually, I think they relieved a lot of pressure by putting it directly on the municipalities that were worried about specific areas. It gave them the resources to do things to areas that weren't a priority.

Any Best Practices?

- We didn't kill anyone. Safety is number one. We did have some fatalities, but they were not related to the event.
- Responders worked efficiently and effectively. Were quick to get on top of the situation and get the job done.

Any Major Area for Improvement?

- Keep the politicians out of it. Or help them to better understand to trust their professional responders.

Anything else we should know?

- Media blew the event way out of proportion and they are probably responsible for people not coming to the beach. Except for a short 2 week window, there was no reason not to come to the AL beaches. Even during that 2 week period, could still find areas of beaches to enjoy that had no oil. And the oil that was coming ashore, was not the typical oil, it had no VOCs, etc.
- Entire country is suffering from economic woes, so I am not sure how much it contributed to the decline, but the numbers show there was a definite decline from last year to this year.

Were involved with signing IAPs at Mobile ICP?

- Yes. It was different than any one that we have done before – we were going over it very detailed at the beginning, but it then got to be so thick, we were signing it without really reviewing it. Never told not to sign, as some other states were told.

What is happening along the coast now?

- SCAT and a few qualified community responder groups (volunteers that were getting paid) are picking up any tarballs that come ashore.
- There is some algae bloom increases, don't know if that is related to the oil.

- Also using some mechanical tools – sort of like snow blowers – to collect the tarballs. The machines are better than the humans at getting all of the tarballs.

Were you aware of any Mental Health issues with responders or public?

- There were some with the public, not with responders.
- Didn't really see the manifestations, but would hear the mental health issues on the radio. Even saw reports in media that were completely misquoted, so got to the point that I would not talk to them. They were pull different parts of what I said and mixing it up and using it out of context to suit their needs

How did the PIOs function in the response organization?

- Yes, but again this person would switch out or loose interest very quickly.
- Had to get rude with them more than once when they were looking for the CAPT Poulin, for example, instead of doing their job like they were supposed to. It was like they were a courier for the media instead of being a buffer.

Others we should Interview?

- Barbara Viskup – State of Mississippi
- Doug White – State of Florida
- Richard Herald – he has also been here quite a bit. He is locked in for an interview.
- Eric Dear was another political victim like Roland.