

Interview Summary Form

Interview Details

Interviewee Names:	Eric Dear	Date:	10/8/10	Time:	2:30pm
Interviewee Title:	MS DEP	Interviewee			
	Barbara Parker	Job Location	MS		
Interviewer Name(s):	Greg Pollock	Interview			
		Location:	Conference Call		

Interview Questions

Describe your regular, pre-incident job duties and also your specific role during the DWH incident, including when you were brought in, what skill sets you were brought in to support?

Initial Question 1:

Focus Area: ACP/Area Com	Question 2:	What is your understanding of, and the familiarity with, all the response plans at the State and Local levels within MS? Were ACPs and the One Gulf Plan used and integrated during the response? Have you participated in Area Committee meetings? Can you tell us who has participated in those meetings and with what regularity the meetings have taken place?
Focus Area: NRF	Question 3:	Were all MS State and Local personnel familiar with NIMS/ICS? Were they easily integrated into the overall ICS response organization? Please speak to how MS was organized for the response with consideration of NCP (OPA 90) and NRF (Stafford Act) processes.
Focus Area: ICP/UAC	Question 4:	Did MS have an equal voice in the Mobile ICP and from the UAC in Robert?
Focus Area: Political Demands	Question 5:	Please describe the effects Political pressure (Federal, state and local) had on the overall response? Were there operational decisions made strictly for political purposes, can you describe the effect this had on the response?
Focus Area: ID Qual./Sustainability	Question 6:	Please describe whether or not the right people and assets were called upon to respond to this spill. Did you think that the people working on the spill were properly trained for this job? Was the equipment that came to MS the right equipment for the tasks at hand? Did equipment and personnel arrive in a timely manner
Focus Area: ID Qual./Sustainability	Question 7:	Can you speak to the long term sustainability of the personnel on this response? We have heard about a variety of working rotations for USCG/State/BP employees, can you speak to what worked well and what did not. Any suggestions for how this long term response could have worked better? Can you say what some of the effects of long term stress were on the personnel involved in the response?
Focus Area: Information Flow/COP	Question 8:	Talk a bit about information flow, both within the Command Posts/UAC/Field How was it managed? If there was misinformation, how was it tracked, validated and corrected? What was successful and what failed (both from an IT/Platform perspective and info content perspective.)
Focus Area: PP/ESA	Question 9:	Can you describe the process used to identify priority protection areas? Did you feel that the right areas were identified for protection? Can you tell us about the protection strategies used and whether or not they were effective?
Focus Area Political Demands	Question 11	Have you had any visibility on the capture and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife? Can you speak to any issues that have come up in MS.

Final Question 1: What was the top "best practice" during this incident, from your perspective?

Final Question 2:	What do you assess to be the top “area needing improvement” (or downright “failures”) from your perspective, and do you have any related recommendations regarding these area(s)?
Final Question 3:	Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?
Final Question 4	Is there anyone else you think we should speak with?
Finally:	THANK-YOU!!

Describe your regular, pre-incident job duties and also your specific role during the DWH incident, including when you were brought in, and what skill sets you were brought in to support?

- Mr. Dear’s regular position is as the Chief of Emergency Services for the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; he has been with MDEQ since June 1999.
- The MDEQ Director is a State Natural Resources Trustee; he is the only one in the state.
- The MDEQ works to protect natural resources and the health and safety of the public every day.
- Eric has a 6 person staff; it is a very small group.
- He was called very early to respond to the DWH event; right from the beginning he started taking conference calls (as early as the middle of April). Conference calls included EPA and USCG.
- He was activated in the later part of April for Unified Command at the ICP in Mobile.
- He deployed to Mobile, AL when activated and was part of the Mobile ICP; he was part of the Unified Command there with the other states, EPA, USCG, NOAA, etc.
- He was the only one from his department to deploy, although he requested additional assistance from management, and did not get it. He also tried to acquire assistance from other State agencies, but did not get their support either.
- In Mississippi, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has to be activated to some degree for other agencies to participate. Mr. Dear discovered this during the first part of the spill that other state agencies could not respond without being activated by MEMA, and MEMA had not activated to allow for their assistance while Eric was there.
- The Mobile ICP coordinated and received information from the UAC in Robert, LA.
- MDEQ did not send an LNO to Robert as they are a small organization and did not have any people to spare.

What is your understanding of, and the familiarity with, all the response plans at the State and Local levels within MS? Were ACPs and the One Gulf Plan used and integrated during the response? Have you participated in Area Committee meetings? Can you tell us who has participated in those meetings and with what regularity the meetings have taken place?

- Locals were not aware of the ACP planning process.
- We have tried to include them at various times; including working with the State of Florida and the USCG a few years ago to update the ACP for endangered species and areas to launch or stage equipment (this ACP update was sponsored by the State of Florida). Locals did not want to participate; however, he anticipates this changing in the near future.
- There was a loss in communications from LA to and from the other states. There was also a disconnect from EPA R6 to R4, and USCG D8 to D7. It all could have worked better or been more fluid.

Are ESAs identified in your ACP? Are they appropriately prioritized? How are they treated in the plan, is it applicable? What about protection areas?

- No, the ACP was inadequate; it did not include ESAs and their prioritization.
- All of the information is known, it is in the head of our lead biologist, who works on the coast at our South Regional Office (SRO). The information exists, but it is not adequately represented on paper, it may be now, but it wasn’t when the DWH event started.

- We have to get this information written down; same with our protection areas. Barbara Vizcup is the person who has all of this information; she is our coastal person.
- We tried to put them on paper through GSTRP (through the Coast Guard), in a GIS software. FL introduced the new software with USCG.

Were all MS State and local personnel familiar with NIMS/ICS? Were they easily integrated into the overall ICS response organization? Please speak to how MS was organized for the response with consideration of NCP (OPA 90) and NRF (Stafford Act) processes.

- Locals, MEMA and State Health Department are all very involved/attuned with NIMS/ICS. Beyond that, state agencies/departments are not familiar.
- Mr. Dear has sent requests since Katrina to get his agency involved and trained in NIMS/ICS and it has not worked or happened to date.
- There was no understanding of the NCP. Our RRT is going to address this in Tampa at Clean Gulf.
 - We need to find a way to educate locals up through the state on the NCP.
 - We work on this daily, but no one understood.
 - Multiple times we said “this is not a hurricane”, and once said, they understood, but there still had to be someone to blame or help.
- Mr. Dear commented that he did not know how small a community of understanding we had until this event happened.

Did MS have an equal voice in the Mobile ICP and from the UAC in Robert? Was MS well represented in Robert at the UAC? Size of the Mobile ICP, did you see when it was very large?

- Absolutely had an equal voice.
- Mr. Dear was the person in UC for a while. He cannot talk about what happened, but he was not there after May 7th.
- He went to Mobile shortly after ICP Mobile was stood up through May 7th.
- Richard Herald took his place, along with a few others who rotated through.
- He was not involved in DWH response after May 7th when he returned to normal duties and was told that he could no longer be involved.
- As far as Mr. Dear knew, no one was at the UAC in Robert. That was by MS choice, it was not any fault of the response.
- USCG and BP did the best that they could. He was impressed with the work done by both.
- USCG and BP had Operations, Environmental, etc. for MS. We worked well together, but he didn't know what happened after he left.
- Ramp up was a little bit slower than he would have liked, and it seemed that maybe it was a little more difficult to get information, but BP and USCG did exactly what we asked.

Please describe the effects Political pressure (Federal, state and local) had on the overall response? Were there operational decisions made strictly for political purposes, can you describe the effect this had on the response?

- Locals did not understand the NCP and ACP. They thought of the DWH event as a Stafford Act response. They started identifying political issues and bringing them up, as they wanted to see action taken. The issues would start at local level and moved up to the state level.
- There was pressure from the White House.
- Responders do not deal well with political pressures, however, the process/system works.
- We were told to do things that did not involve protecting natural resources.
- Examples:
 - Skimmer boats: Very early the USCG and BP asked Mississippi about what type of skimmer boats they needed (i.e., deep water, shallow water, etc.). For some reason, Mississippi decided to purchase 19 skimmer boats at \$300-400K a piece. Some of the boats didn't even

- float, although they were new, some sank when launched. These boats will now be used sampling platforms. They were purchased with some of the money that BP gave to the state.
- Boom: We placed boom across a huge area, using experts provided through BP. We placed boom according to their expertise and then were told by leadership that they did not like how it was placed.
 - Filter Fence: A filter fence is a fence that is made of a fabric that is meant to keep oil out. It does not let the critters come into the marshes, and does not keep tar balls out. "We" decided to put up 30 miles of this filter fence; we have 90 miles of coast. It kept critters and turtles from entering the marshes, but not oil out. Before it was all placed, we were already removing it as it did not work.

Do you know how the rest of the \$50mil was spent?

- \$25 mil was spent on skimmer boats, though the state is trying to get out of the deal (see examples above); \$23 mil was spent on the filter fence. That is all that Mr. Dear knows about. He was cut out of the process after the first \$25mil.
- The skimmer boats were constructed locally.

Please describe whether or not the right people and assets were called upon to respond to this spill. Did you think that the people working on the spill were properly trained for this job? Was the equipment that came to MS the right equipment for the tasks at hand?

- Mr. Dear said that he could not speak about BP staff.
- The people that he dealt with in the UC were well trained.
- He does not know if all of the promised assets were produced. He was told it would be there, and he believes it is the job of states and locals to give the RP an opportunity to do the right thing. From what Mr. Dear saw, they did.
- Everyone appeared to be well trained and doing the best that they could.
- His time was spent in the command post vs. in the field.

Did equipment and personnel arrive in a timely manner?

- Mississippi never got much oil. How many assets do you need if you don't have much oil? Have to send the assets where the oil actually is.

Can you speak to the long term sustainability of the personnel on this response? We have heard about a variety of working rotations for USCG/State/BP employees, can you speak to what worked well and what did not. Any suggestions for how this long term response could have worked better? Can you say what some of the effects of long term stress were on the personnel involved in the response?

- MDEQ is a small group, but have 40-50 people from various state agencies that are hazmat (and ICS) trained.
- When we have a large response, they are called to help fill in where MDEQ cannot.
- We have regular schedules and basically do a 2 week tour (sometimes varies) and then have week off, and return.
- Some have only 5-7 days if they have family duties.

Talk a bit about information flow, both within the Command Posts/UAC/Field? How was it managed? If there was misinformation, how was it tracked, validated and corrected? What was successful and what failed (both from an IT/Platform perspective and info content perspective.)

- Information flow was the biggest issue. Knew what we needed at Robert, Houma or Mobile, but had difficulty communicating it to the field and in getting information back.

- He thinks the system works, but when you have that many people involved (multiple states, CG Districts, etc.), it is hard.
- Another challenge was providing information up to upper management, as if you cannot get the information, it is hard to report on something that you have little knowledge.
- The locals thought that the Federal government, like FEMA during Katrina, would come in and take care of everything. It was up to Mr. Dear to explain that this does not happen with oil spills or under the NCP.
- BP was a little slow in being proactive; they didn't get claims offices up and operating as fast as they should have.
- There was also a problem with people being there, but they were not sure what they were supposed to do.

Did you have access to a Common Operating Picture when in Mobile?

- Yes, and they did a very good job.
- NOAA was not able to answer some of the specific questions we had early on; we were all concerned with our particular state.
- We had maps, and there were good people, but we were all being pressured to give information up the chain, and we looked to these folks as the experts, and they could not give us specific information, so we didn't have specific information to pass up the chain.
- We were looking at oil and they were talking about different types of sheens, but you cannot clean up sheen. We just were not getting enough information on where the oil was located. We all kept asking "where is the oil," as that was all we wanted to know. Early on they didn't provide this information, and it was driving the public crazy.

Have you had any visibility on the capture and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife? Can you speak to any issues that have come up in MS?

- We started to get reports early on about oiled wildlife. BP had a private entity to rehabilitate the critters.
- At the state level we have an agency (Board of Animal Health) that is in charge of rehabilitation, but they were not involved because of the same issue noted earlier (MEMA had not activated, and therefore BAH was not allowed to participate).
- At some point after Mr. Dear was not involved (after May 7th), it did get worked out and other state agencies got engaged, but he does not know the details.
- It was the state that was stopping the activation of the agencies.
- Mr. Dear did not know what impact the declaration of a state of emergency had on response.
- He did not understand why everything did not happen the way it should have.

Best Practice

- BP's willingness to be there and do what they needed to do.
- We quickly got to the point where there was not a regulatory agency and an RP, but they were working together as a unified team. The USCG people he worked with in Mobile knew their job; they had Strike Team experience, and were well informed.
- When you look at how much oil there was, how much actually got contaminated, and the lack of on-shore impacts, of course there were some bad areas, out of the millions of gallons, it is pretty amazing what was accomplished. Fundamentally the system worked.

Area for Improvement & Recommendation

- Communications was the biggest problem. The response was so large and you had so many angles/people coming to you for information, it just caused problems.
- The MS River area has to change. If we have to do this again, have to remove the river boundary and all work together. When something happens, the river holds things up, it is a problem. It has been that

way for years. It separates the USCG Districts and EPA Regional boundaries. They are just different entities and communicate differently. At the Federal level they are held up at this boundary. States and locals can talk, we do it and call whoever we need all the time, but the Federal government has to find same way to break down that boundary to allow us to all communicate better together.

- Response was a little slower than it should have been, there was a learning curve for USCG and BP it seemed.
- Mr. Dear emphasized that he does not believe that changing the NCP and rewriting OPA90 is the right way to go; he thinks that is wrong. Industry is concerned, and those that have worked here for years know how it works, changing the laws will not help.