Response Capacity

NOAA is notified of over 200 spills/year. How often do spills occur simultaneously? What is NOAA's capacity to handle two spills at the same time?

Answer:

- **NOAA responds regularly to simultaneous minor spills. The U.S. Coast Guard classifies minor offshore spills as those less than 10,000 gallons (238 barrels).**

- **On average, every 2-4 years, NOAA has had to implement overlapping field operations on a medium to large sized spill.**

- **An example of two simultaneous large spills are the M/T *ATHOS I (Athos)* accident in New Jersey, which released nearly 265,000 gallons of crude oil into the Delaware River and nearby tributaries and the M/V *Selendang Ayu*, which ran aground and broke in half off Unalaska Island in the Aleutian Islands. This cargo vessel released an estimated 354,218 gallons of oil into the environment.**

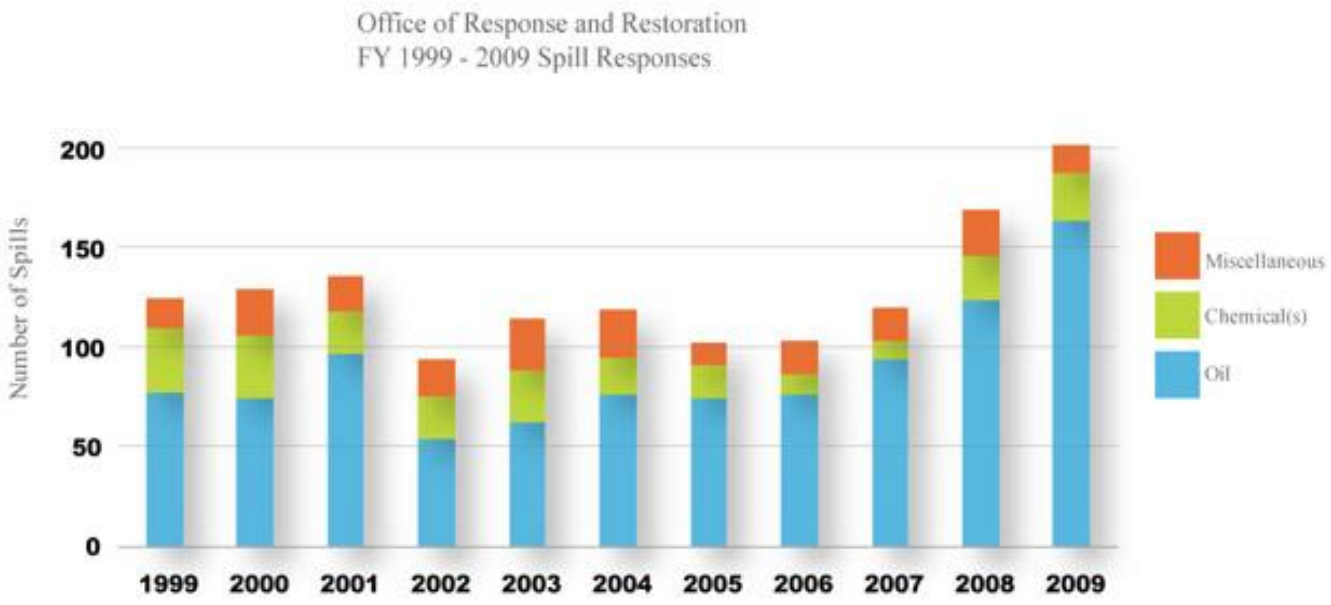
- **In addition, NOAA responded to multiple spills resulting from Hurricane Katrina in 2005.**

- **In the past NOAA has stated that if two simultaneous medium spill events were to occur, or one large spill such as the Exxon Valdez, NOAA would have difficulty providing the level of response expected by the nation.**

- **Responding to the Deepwater spill does represent a significant challenge for NOAA. Currently, NOAA has every Scientific Support Coordinator (SSC) in the country working on the Deepwater spill. NOAA currently has three oceanographers who do trajectory modeling. These individuals are generating modeling products twice a day. NOAA has enlisted scientists and specialists who retired from the agency to support the**

agency with the Deepwater Horizon response, along with numerous personnel with applicable skills from across the agency.

Background:

- U.S. Coast Guard's offshore spill size classifications:
  - MINOR, less than 10,000 gallons (238 barrels);
  - MEDIUM, 10,000 to 99,999 gallons (238 to 2,380 barrels); and
  - MAJOR, 100,000 gallons (2,381 barrels and greater).

- These size categories are for coastal and offshore waters and are based solely on spill volume. Of the 2,645 petroleum spills between 1971 and 2007, 2,583 (97.7%) were MINOR in size. These MINOR spills were responsible for 25,477 (15.5%) of the barrels spilled.