

Emergency Response Capabilities – Are your teams US Ready?



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The ability to withstand and recover from a difficult situation makes an organization resilient and, often, that is the key differentiator between a big crisis and a controlled one. Good operators manage their risk better through continual honing of their response capabilities.

Manifold risks arising from operating mobile floating assets in different jurisdictions, and often transporting dangerous goods, are integral to the nature and business of shipping. The monetary and reputational costs of any incident can be extremely high. It takes years of training, experience, and good leadership to effectively respond to an unplanned event and curtail a crisis to manageable levels. It is not surprising, therefore, that response training is high on the agenda of ship owners, operators and managers.

Operating vessels in United States waters is even more demanding due to a complex regulatory environment. The Qualified Individuals, across the spectrum, have done a marvellous job helping

their clients navigate and fulfil these requirements. However, very few operators have had first-hand exposure to the methodology practiced in the US for handling incidents. Most emergency plans fall well short of addressing this important aspect.

The United States uses a standardised approach towards command, control and coordination of emergency response, called the Incident Command System (ICS). The system brings together key stakeholders under a unified command so that coherent directives are given to the responders with clearly laid out objectives from a single source. This helps in synergising the response effort of diverse teams towards common goals that are reviewed and adjusted based on evolving situations.

O'Brien's Response Management (ORM) has been at the forefront of incident response in the US and is helping bridge these gaps through customised, live 'in-house' exercises. These emergency drills are constructed around the ICS framework and are carried out at the clients' premises with the live involvement of an experienced incident response commander. An on-site representative is present at the client's Emergency Response Room (ERR), to help steer these drills and observe the response activities. The scenarios are demanding and realistic, and aim to test their capabilities in spill response, salvage, rescue, security and the management of public opinion, amongst others.

Apart from providing a first-hand experience of the functioning and command structure of the Incident Command System, these drills serve to enhance awareness of 'management by objectives', the root of the ICS paradigm. The participants also get to hone their skills on a range of reporting requirements and liability issues that arise during an incident in the US. In addition, these exercises present opportunities for team building, providing experience to new Emergency Response Team (ERT) members, refining leadership skills and testing communication channels. The ERR facilities are also assessed in a live environment. An independent validation is obtained of their emergency preparedness through a comprehensive written report.

ORM has partnered with Navigate Response in several of these drills to impress upon the teams the importance of pro-active media management. About 80 of these exercises are conducted annually and they provide an opportunity for sharing some industry best practices in incident response amongst clients.

In the US context, it is imperative to understand how the emergency teams can integrate with the response effort on the ground and help control loss. Regular ICS-based training and drills at all levels, including the senior sea staff, will go a long way towards understanding these requirements better.

So, are your teams US ready?

