

## Focus on: Geographic Response Plans



Figure 1: Responders deploy oil spill boom from a small boat.

### Contact information

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Find Washington's GRPs online at:  
<https://www.oilspills101.wa.gov>

### Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-7211 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

### GRPs protect our waterways

Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) cover specific areas of the state that are particularly vulnerable to oil spills from vessels, trains, pipelines, and facilities. GRPs contain vital information for people responding to oil spills; regional contact information for Tribes, response partners, and trustee agencies; as well as detailed response strategies designed to reduce injury to sensitive natural, cultural, and economic resources.

GRPs have two main objectives:

- Identify natural, cultural, or economic resources at risk from oil spills.
- Help direct and prioritize response actions during the initial hours of an oil spill.

### How are GRPs developed?

The Department of Ecology facilitates the collaborative approach to developing GRPs. We seek input and invite engagement from all interested parties, including spill management and response experts, the oil industry, local, state, tribal, and federal governments, non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, and the public.

GRP development involves identifying resources at risk, designing response and notification strategies to protect those resources, and identifying staging areas and boat launches to help plan a spill response. Every proposed strategy is visited and evaluated, and then submitted to the public for feedback. After public comments are reviewed, the GRP is published as an annex to the greater Northwest Regional Contingency Plan.

## How are GRPs used?

After stopping the spill at its source, GRPs are the initial “marching orders” responders follow to protect sensitive resources. GRPs include priority tables that describe the order in which protection strategies should be completed based on level of risk and how close the resource is to a likely spill location. For example, a response strategy tactic may be to divert oil from a sensitive resource toward an area where it can be more easily removed. While a strategy like this may direct oil to one area, it may also protect a more valuable or sensitive resource like an important cultural site, wildlife habitat, or drinking water intake.

GRPs are not the last line of defense—they are meant to be deployed quickly when a spill is first reported. Oil spills are dynamic and require a wide range of response equipment and strategies. While GRPs are deployed early on in a spill, other incident-specific plans and tactics are soon to follow. If a GRP strategy has not been developed for a certain area, it doesn’t mean that those resources won’t be protected in the event of a spill.

## How are GRPs tested and updated?

Oil spill response experts frequently test GRP response strategies during drills and actual oil spills. Testing strategies help verify their effectiveness and provides responders with important training opportunities. After they are tested, we use the lessons learned to update GRPs. These plans are in a constant state of improvement.

## Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

**Q:** *Why isn’t there a GRP strategy for my favorite fishing hole/dog park/beach, etc.?*

**A:** If you know of a resource at risk that is not protected in a GRP, let us know! We strive to identify all areas that must be protected during a spill. We work with trustee agencies, subject matter experts, and local communities to prioritize which areas must be protected in the early hours of a spill. To learn more about GRPs, which ones are being updated, how to submit a comment, or how you can become involved, please visit [OilSpills101.wa.gov](https://oilspills101.wa.gov).

**Q:** *Who determines what should be protected?*

**A:** During the process of developing or updating GRPs, Ecology works with local communities, tribes, state and federal agencies, environmental organizations, and many others, to ensure we collect a clear overview of the area’s resources at risk. Once strategies are developed for the identified resources, stakeholders are consulted again to help prioritize the order in which they will be protected.

**Q:** *What are response strategies?*

**A:** Response strategies are designed to either collect floating oil in a specific place, or to deflect or exclude oil from a sensitive area or resource.

**Q:** *What is boom and what type of oil are GRPs designed for?*

**A:** Boom is a common piece of oil spill response equipment used to collect, deflect, or contain oil that floats on water. Booming strategies are primarily designed for floating oil. Although most oil floats when spilled to water, Washington’s GRPs now include response considerations for non-floating oils, and threats to resources in the water column and on the seafloor.

## How do I comment on a strategy or suggest an update?

Ecology updates GRPs regularly to ensure information is accurate and up-to-date. Our quarterly GRP newsletter highlights recent updates and provides contact information for Ecology Planners conducting comprehensive updates on a GRP. You can reach out to these staff members directly with questions, or if you would like to be involved in the update. Comments and lessons learned for all GRPs can be sent to [GRPs@ECY.WA.GOV](mailto:GRPs@ECY.WA.GOV). You can also scan the QR code, or follow this link to fill out our *GRP Strategy Assessment Form*: <https://cutt.ly/QBNzqtG>.

