

The Californian Experience

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The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska was California's wake-up call. California responded to public outcry in the aftermath to this incident by taking decisive measures to prevent similar disaster in the future by passing legislation to establish the Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR).

OSPR is the lead California state agency for oil spills with substantial authority to direct spill prevention, response, clean up activities, natural resource damage assessment (NRDA), and restoration. Moreover, OSPR is unique in that it is the only coastal state agency in the United States that has combined regulatory, pollution response, and public trustee authority to protect and manage the State's fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. Thus, OSPR's dual regulatory/ trustee authority assures that oil spill prevention, response, and restoration will safeguard affected wildlife and the ecosystem in which they live.

To meet this challenge, OSPR has developed a variety of programs that fall under four strategic themes: prevention, preparedness, response, and restoration. This paper discusses OSPR programs, their development, implementation and relationship to improving oil spill response in California. Additionally, strategies will be discussed on how to better serve the public trust by addressing measures to further reduce threats of oil spills in California's marine waters.