

Learning the lessons of history

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Oil spills have been happening since the industry began and in every incident we have learned lessons. Oil spill responders take delight in telling the world that “every oil spill is different”. This is true from the perspective that every spill occurs in a unique environment and the oil type has a specific effect on the outcome of the spill. In addition, the weather conditions throughout the spill will also be unique to that event and will have a profound effect on the situation. None of this can be denied. The fact that does not always come out so readily is that the problems faced in oil spills are very often similar and we fail to learn the lessons from previous experiences and subsequently repeat the mistakes.

Oil spill response is something that everyone trains for but fortunately very few people ever use, for this reason the pool of expertise is small, and with the lack of incidents, getting ever smaller.

The paper looks at some of the harsh lessons of history in oil spill response and reflects on what we can and should learn from these experiences. It also reminds us that because the experiences are so few we must share them to ensure that they are not lost in the mist of time and we end up re-inventing the wheel.