

Frequently-Asked Questions

Institutional Issues

Here are answers to some questions that people have asked about the institutions that conduct in-situ burning (ISB) as an oil spill response.

Q. Who makes the decision to conduct a burn? Is it the responsibility of local, state, or federal authorities?

A. The use of ISB as an oil spill response tool is regulated by both federal and state law. Regional Response Teams, made up of federal and state agencies, have developed guidelines that provide a common decision-making process to evaluate the appropriateness of using ISB during a spill response. **The Federal On-Scene Coordinator, in consultation with the State On-Scene Coordinator, has the authority to approve ISB.** When deciding whether to conduct ISB, the coordinators consult with air quality experts, meteorologists, response contractors, and experts on burning.

Q. How soon does a decision to burn have to be made?

A. The decision to burn generally needs to be made within the first few hours following a spill. Because spilled oil rapidly emulsifies, it becomes more difficult to ignite with time. If the weather and sea conditions are very calm, the time frame may be extended; however, the decision must be made quite quickly because it takes time to assemble the personnel and equipment necessary to conduct a burn.

Q. How will I be notified if there is going to be a burn in my area?

A. The local, state, and federal response organizations involved in the response will meet with elected officials, the public, and the media to discuss the response and the activities currently taking place. Monitor your newspaper, radio, and television for current reports and announcements of meetings in your area.

Q. Who pays for a burn?

A. The federal government insures that the spill area is cleaned, but the spiller is generally responsible for all costs associated with the cleanup, including an in-situ burn.

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