

# POTENTIAL PLACES OF REFUGE (PPOR)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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**Question: What is a PPOR?**

**Answer:** Potential Place(s) of Refuge (PPOR) is defined as a location where a vessel needing assistance can be temporarily moved, and where actions can then be taken to stabilize the vessel, protect human life, reduce a hazard to navigation, and/or protect sensitive natural resources and other uses of the area. A place of refuge may include constructed harbors, ports, docks, anchorages, a natural embayment, potential grounding sites, or offshore waters.

**Question: What is the relevance of potential places of refuge (PPOR) planning to my organization?**

**Answer:** Distressed vessels continue to be a common occurrence despite the best efforts of ship-owners and operators. In recent years there have been some notable marine casualties where a vessel sought place of refuge assistance from coastal flag authorities, including *M/T Prestige* in Spain in 2002, and *M/V Hollandic Confidence* and *M/V New Carissa* in California in 1999. PPOR guidance developed in 2003 by the U.S. Coast Guard is intended to provide stakeholders a framework for planning, preparedness, and response with respect to potentially polluting ships in need of assistance.

**Question: What is the difference between a potential and a pre-determined place of refuge?**

**Answer:** No place can be charted that will suit all circumstances for an emergency place of refuge decision, so these places cannot be established in any permanent way. The best pre-planning will identify the sites that might *potentially* serve as temporary refuge for small to large vessels. Apart from simply identifying these on a chart, all available information on the physical and oceanographic characteristics of each site, the land and resource trustees in the area, the presence of sensitive resources (natural, cultural and historic), and stakeholder contact information, access points, nearest oil spill responders, etc. will be pre-loaded into a database. Information will also be used to generate graphic and table output to regional oil spill Area Contingency Plans (ACPs). The information in the ACP will serve as a starting point for the U.S. Coast Guard place of refuge decision during an actual incident. The pre-gathered information will guide them to a decision and a site that provides the best emergency refuge, in that particular situation, with that particular vessel, with the fewest negative consequences to human safety and the environment.

**Question: How was the list of potential places of refuge developed?**

**Answer:** Local mariners, port and harbor district staff, and large vessel pilots identified potential places of refuge based on the feasibility of a safe anchorage at a given location for vessels of various size and draft. Potential places of refuge were identified based on presence of ports, harbors, docks or anchorages, existence of natural shelter from prevailing winds and storms, lack of navigational hazards, presence of existing mooring or piers, and proximity to possible on-land access and staging areas.

**Question: If my agency participates by providing information on sensitive resources for a given area considered a PPOR, will this participation be considered permission to allow a disabled vessel to find refuge here?**

**Answer:** No, participation in the PPOR planning process by providing information about sites that could potentially be chosen as a place of refuge does not constitute an agency pre-approval of that site for that use. During an actual incident, the federal and state agencies responsible for making a PPOR use decision will use

the pre-gathered information as a starting point, but will also make every effort to contact the stakeholders for their real-time, incident-specific input to the decision. The most complete pre-gathered information on sensitive resources for each potential area, coupled with real-time consultations with affected agencies and jurisdictions during an actual incident, will lead to better and more responsive decisions about what PPOR site or sites should be used in that incident. Waiting until the incident to gather that information could lead to a delayed, ill-informed and ill-advised decision. Taking these planning actions now will help prevent or minimize potential adverse affects to the public, to the regional environment (whether identified as potential places of refuge or not), and to resource users.

***Question:*** How can we be certain historic/cultural sites and subsistence lands that may occur in a proposed place of refuge will be protected?

***Answer:*** In the event a particular location would be considered as a potential place to harbor a vessel seeking refuge, historic preservation specialists would survey the site to determine if such resources might be affected, and direct where operations could safely be accommodated. Local experts would also be consulted in the event that subsistence lands may be affected. Information on historic and cultural sites in California is maintained in the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) and Historical Resources Inventory (HRI) database by the Office of Historic Preservation of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

***Question:*** How were natural and historic/cultural resources considered in the PPOR process?

***Answer:*** Natural and historic/cultural resource trustee management requires weighing concerns that range from a need to protect biodiversity and environmental health, to production and sustainability of wildlife and wildlife habitats for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses. Perspectives on what makes any particular natural or historic/cultural resource “important” can include environmental, economic, moral, and aesthetic values. Effective trustees understand the diverse values provided by natural resources and complex ecological systems, as well as historic and cultural resources and strive to balance those critical values with human demands and beliefs. Conflicts may arise when management and decision strategies try to account for all the different types of uses and values we place on our resources. The necessary trade-off decisions that must be made during an emergency response will strive to protect human health and safety (first), while minimizing environmental and historic/cultural damage (second), and economic consequences (third).

***Question:*** How will the decision to actually use a potential place of refuge be made? What criteria will be used to make the necessary and inevitable trade-off decisions between and among several potential sites?

***Answer:*** The U.S. Coast Guard will be charged with making the decision about how to handle a vessel’s request for a place of refuge. Each incident will be different, and the decision will have to evaluate, among many other factors, the status of the vessel and its crew, the vessel’s ability to make it to the nearest port, and the current and forecasted weather and sea state. The Coast Guard will use a risk-based decision-making process to help weigh and balance the variables under consideration. The consequences they will consider include human health and safety (of vessel crew, responders, and public at large), natural resources (including threatened and endangered species, subsistence species, commercial species, habitat, and historic/cultural resources) and economic impacts (including commercial shipping and fishing, marine tourism and recreational fishing, and non-marine related economic activities). Among the courses of action available to the U.S. Coast Guard are allowing the vessel to continue its voyage, allowing vessel repairs to be made in place, choosing among several potential places of refuge, deliberately grounding the vessel on shore, or scuttling it over deep water. The Captain of the Port (COTP) has jurisdiction over approving a PPOR site for a vessel in distress. The selection of a place of refuge by the COTP in consultation with other agencies and stakeholders will always be made on a case-by-case basis.