

Rena oil spill response transition

Friday, 4 May 2012 12:45 p.m.

The National On Scene Commander has today reduced the emergency oil spill response to the Rena grounding from a Tier 3, or national level, to a Tier 2, or regional level response.

This means the Bay of Plenty Regional Council will now assume responsibility for ongoing monitoring and future clean-up activity with respect to any further oil spilled from the wreck.

This decision was made in consultation with the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and as a result of careful analysis of several key factors:

- Regular assessments of the wreck confirmed the threat of a further significant oil spill from the wreck was minimal.
- Ongoing and regular surveys by the oil spill response team of previously affected areas confirmed very low levels of residual oil in the environment and very minimal amounts of oil coming ashore. The levels are so low that clean-up activity has not been warranted.
- Site visits to previously affected areas with key stakeholders, including the regional council, Iwi and environmental experts confirmed they have reached a level where no further clean-up activity is needed.
- The volume of calls from the public reporting sightings of oil on the beaches or in the water has been consistently low for the past few months.

National On Scene Commander Rob Service said the transition marked a real milestone in the response to the Rena grounding and was testimony to many months of hard work by the oil spill response team.

"This has been an amazing effort and we have seen some incredible team work, expertise and hard graft, put in by so many people.

"At the start of this response we had international oil spill response professionals assisting us, we had the Army out in their hundreds cleaning these beaches, and of course we had many, many volunteers giving up their time for the beaches they love. The local councils and local Iwi also played huge roles in responding to this incident.

"Over time, this massive effort has downsized to the point where in recent weeks we have had just a few oil spill response experts surveying and re-surveying the affected areas to assess whether we were ready to reduce from Tier 3 to Tier 2. It's a real achievement to reach this point."

However, Mr Service warned the response was not over.

"This is not the end - the response has simply been reduced from a national level to a regional level.

"Members of the public may still find residual oil on beaches from time to time - this is to be expected and we encourage people to continue to report oil sightings to the 0800 OIL SPILL line."

The regional council will receive all reports to the 0800 OIL SPILL line and will follow them up as appropriate.

Bay of Plenty Regional Council Water Management Group Manager Eddie Grogansaid local people and authorities had been involved with the response from the start and had provided significant support to the MNZ-lead response.

"While monitoring will continue, the limited amount of oil still on the ship means that it is appropriate that this operation is handled at a regional level," Mr Grogan said.

"For Regional Council, this has always been about local people taking responsibility for their coastline as shown by the volunteer effort that mobilised as part of the response.

"Council will continue to recover costs for any further oil spill response work to minimise any financial impact on our community and our ratepayers.

"It is timely to thank all the people who have put in so much hard work, but to also reassure our community that we are all still focussed on the response."

Mr Service said the regional council oil spill response team was an expert and experienced team and had worked on the Rena oil spill response since day one.

MNZ would be available to provide any further advice, equipment or personnel the regional team might need.

MNZ would continue to have a team in Tauranga fulfilling the salvage oversight role. This team would move out of the incident command centre in Greerton to a smaller space in Mount Maunganui.

