First Responder Training and Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) Testing Exercise Series

Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury

After-Action Report

May 15, 2025

The After-Action Report (AAR) aligns exercise objectives with preparedness doctrine and related frameworks and guidance. Exercise information required for preparedness reporting and trend analysis is included; users are encouraged to add additional sections as needed to support their own organizational needs.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Table 1: Exercise Overview

Exercise Name	2025 Newbury/Newburyport/Salisbury Geographic Response Strategy Exercise
Exercise Date	May 15, 2025
Scope	This was a full-scale exercise planned for approximately six hours at the North End Boat Club in Newburyport, MA. Exercise play was limited to the Cashman Park Public Boat Launch and the adjacent shorelines.
Mission Area(s)	Prevention, Protection, Response
Capabilities	Environmental Response/Health and Safety, Operational Coordination, Operational Communications
Objectives	Demonstrate the ability of local first responders to: **Objective 1**: Conduct initial response activities within the first 4-6 hours of an oil spill incident by deploying MassDEP oil spill response equipment and implementing common Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) tactics in alignment with the MassDEP GRS Tactics Guide. **Objective 2**: Establish and maintain command and control in the first 4-6 hours of an oil spill incident response by identifying relative health and safety hazards, developing an initial response organization, and communicating response objectives, strategies, and tactics through the completion of an Incident Briefing form (ICS 201) and the facilitation of an Operations and Safety Briefing. **Objective 3**: Communicate information and actions between multiple local, state, and federal agencies within the first 4-6 hours of an oil spill incident by identifying a common UHF or VHF radio channel that can be utilized by all participants.
Threat or Hazard	Discharge of oil into a navigable waterway
Scenario	An oil spill has occurred that threatens the Merrimack River and adjacent shorelines. The Newbury, Newburyport, and Salisbury Fire Departments and Police/Harbormaster Departments will utilize various common Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) tactics to protect sensitive resources in the Merrimack River and the surrounding area.
Sponsor	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Participating Organizations	Participating organizations included: • Newbury Fire Department • Newbury Police Department/Harbormaster • Newburyport Fire Department • Newburyport Harbormaster • Salisbury Fire Department • United States Coast Guard Sector Boston • MassDEP • Moran Environmental Recovery (MER) • Nuka Research
Point of Contact	Julie Hutcheson, Marine Oil Spill Prevention & Response Program Coordinator Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection 100 Cambridge St., Suite 900 Boston, MA 02114 (617) 366-7424 julie.hutcheson@mass.gov

Figure 1: Participants practice configuring a shoreside anchor system

Figure 2: Participants practice connecting sections of boom

Figure 3: Participants practice assembling marine anchor systems

Figure 4: Participants learn about sorbent materials, culvert plugs, and heaving lines

Photos courtesy of Nuka Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exercise Planning

In preparation for the Newbury/Newburyport/Salisbury exercise, both an Initial Planning Meeting (IPM) and a Final Planning Meeting (FPM) were conducted with members of the Exercise Planning Team (EPT). The EPT consisted of senior personnel from each of the participating organizations listed in the Exercise Overview section.

Initial Planning Meeting

A hybrid Initial Planning Meeting (IPM) was held via Zoom and in-person at the Newburyport Police Department (4 Green St, Newburyport, MA, 01950) on Wednesday, March 12th, from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM.

Purpose

The purpose of the IPM was to discuss and identify logistical requirements for the exercise, including the date, classroom and deployment locations, personnel and vessel needs, and any additional operational considerations.

Participants

Table 2: IPM Participants

Name	Title/Rank	Department/Organization
Scott Carrigan	Chief	Salisbury Fire Department
Andrew Murphy	Deputy Chief	
Adam Foss	Lieutenant	
Paul Hogg	Harbormaster	Newburyport Harbormaster
Stephen Bradbury III	Chief	Newburyport Fire Department
Stephen Hamilton	Lieutenant	
Jim Velonis	Deputy Harbormaster	Newbury Harbormaster

Outcomes

A summary of key IPM outcomes is provided below. Additional details are available in the exercise ICS-201.

- **Exercise Date:** Thursday, May 15th
- **Classroom Location:** North End Boat Club (282 Merrimac St, Newburyport)
- **Deployment Location(s):** Cashman Park Public Boat Launch (Sally Snyder Way, Newburyport)
- **Additional Resources:** Salisbury FD Drone; Amesbury FD Drone
- **Deployment Notes:** Currents and water depths are factors in the Merrimack River throughout Newburyport and Salisbury

Final Planning Meeting

A Final Planning Meeting (FPM) was held via Zoom on Thursday, May 8, from 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM.

Purpose

The purpose of the FPM was to review the draft ICS-201 to validate exercise logistics confirmed during the IPM and to discuss any outstanding operational details needed to support the on-water deployment.

Participants

Table 3: FPM Participants

Name	Title/Rank	Department/Organization
Andrew Murphy	Deputy Chief	Salisbury Fire Department
Adam Foss	Lieutenant	
Paul Hogg	Harbormaster	Newburyport Harbormaster
Stephen Bradbury III	Chief	Newburyport Fire Department

Name	Title/Rank	Department/Organization
Patricia Fisher	Chief	Newbury Harbormaster
Jim Velonis	Deputy Harbormaster	
David Evans	Chief	Newbury Fire Department

Outcomes

A summary of key FPM outcomes is provided below, including a description of deployment plans.

- Deploy and test the 900ft DV01a tactic, as shown in the Newburyport (NS02A) GRS below.

Exercise Conduct

Exercise controllers and senior participant personnel monitor weather forecasts and may also conduct pre-deployment site surveys to identify any physical or environmental limitations that could impact execution of the deployment plan. Any necessary adjustments to the plan and the conditions observed on the day of the exercise are summarized below.

Table 4: Summary of Observed Conditions

Factor	Observed Conditions
Wind speed and direction	8 mph, ESE
Tidal conditions	Flood tide/Ebb tide
Water depth (approx.)	7.3 ft
Wave action & Current speed (approx.)	Strong current
Vessel traffic	Minimal
Harbor mooring field density	Moderate
Other observations	Tide switched during on-water deployment

The following deployment activities were completed:

- Complete the deployment of a modified, single leg, 600 ft DV01a tactic due to a shifting tide and to avoid operating within the active channel nearby.

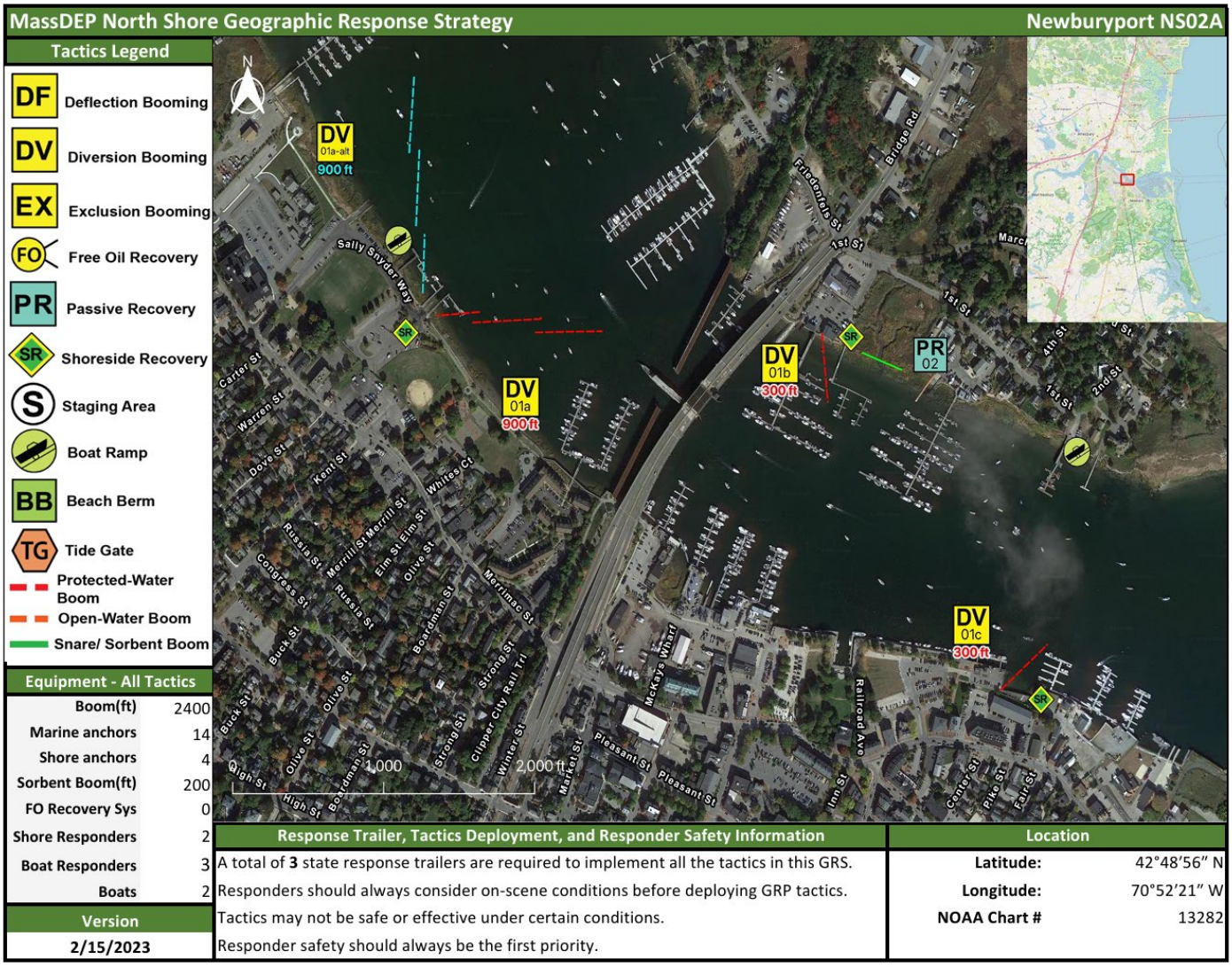

Figure 5: Original GRS Testing Exercise Tactics Map

EXERCISE REPORT

Objective 1: Conduct initial response activities within the first 4-6 hours of an oil spill incident by deploying MassDEP oil spill response equipment and implementing common GRS tactics in alignment with the MassDEP GRS Tactics Guide.

Strength: Shoreside crews worked together to properly stage the response trailer in proximity to the boat ramp, unload a 600ft section of boom, load marine anchor systems onto the appropriate vessels, and conduct shore-to-vessel transfer using a heaving line.

Strength: Vessel crews effectively towed boom to the site of DV01a and shoreside crews worked to connect the boom to a ramp-side anchor system. Vessel crews then positioned the other end of the array with a marine anchor to complete a modified, 600ft diversion tactic.

Strength: Command staff, vessel crews, and drone support personnel worked together to discuss and coordinate modifications to the deployment plan to avoid operating in the active boat channel.

Figure 6: Shoreside crews use heaving line to transfer boom to an awaiting vessel

Observation: Using the heaving line, shoreside crews made several unsuccessful attempts to transfer boom from the boat ramp to an awaiting vessel.

Analysis: On the third attempt to transfer boom to an awaiting vessel, the heaving line snapped, causing slight delays in the shore-to-vessel transfer process. Shore crews worked quickly to repair the snapped line and were eventually able to transfer the boom successfully.

Objective 2: Establish and maintain command and control in the first 4-6 hours of an oil spill incident response by identifying relative health and safety hazards, developing an initial response organization, and communicating response objectives, strategies, and tactics through the completion of an Incident Briefing form (ICS-201) and the facilitation of an Operations and Safety Briefing.

Strength: The Incident Commander (IC) quickly identified a Safety Officer (SO). Together, the IC and SO coordinated shore and vessel crew assignments, then effectively communicated deployment plans, roles and responsibilities, and operational safety considerations through an Operations and Safety briefing.

Strength: Command staff and drone support personnel utilized live drone footage to monitor and direct deployment activities, then coordinate adjustments as needed.

Figure 7: Shoreside crews begin to unload boom from the equipment trailer to configure a shoreside anchor point

Objective 3: Communicate between multiple local, state, and federal agencies, including fire, police and harbormaster departments using VHF and UHF communications.

Strength: Command Staff pre-identified Channel 12 as the primary radio communications channel and directed participants to join during the Operations and Safety briefing.

Strength: All crews demonstrated excellent communication skills, allowing for adjustments to be made safely and effectively.

Observation: Shore and vessel crews did not utilize radios to communicate with one another when towing boom, causing minor miscommunications relating to efforts to attach a towing bridle to the end of the boom prior to deploying a marine anchor system.

Analysis: After the shore crew transferred the 600ft segment of boom to a work vessel, towing operations began. Shortly after initiating the towing evolution, all operations were briefly paused to allow shore crews to attach a bridle to the end of the boom segment. While this only slightly delayed the deployment, time could have been saved by attaching bridles to both ends of the boom before engaging in towing operations.

Figure 8: Work vessel drops a marine anchor (background). Shoreside anchor set-up (foreground).

PARTICIPANTS & RESOURCES

Table 5: List of Participants

Participating Organizations	Participant Count
Town of Newbury, MA	
Newbury Fire Department	2
Newbury Police Department/Harbormaster	1
City of Newburyport, MA	
Newburyport Fire Department	11
Newburyport Harbormaster	5
Town of Salisbury, MA	
Salisbury Fire Department	7
Amesbury Fire Department	1
TOTAL TOWN/CITY PARTICIPANTS	**27**
State	
Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)	4
Nuka Research and Planning Group, LLC (contractor for MassDEP)	2
Moran Environmental Recovery (contractor for MassDEP)	3
Federal	
United States Coast Guard Sector Boston	4
TOTAL	**40**

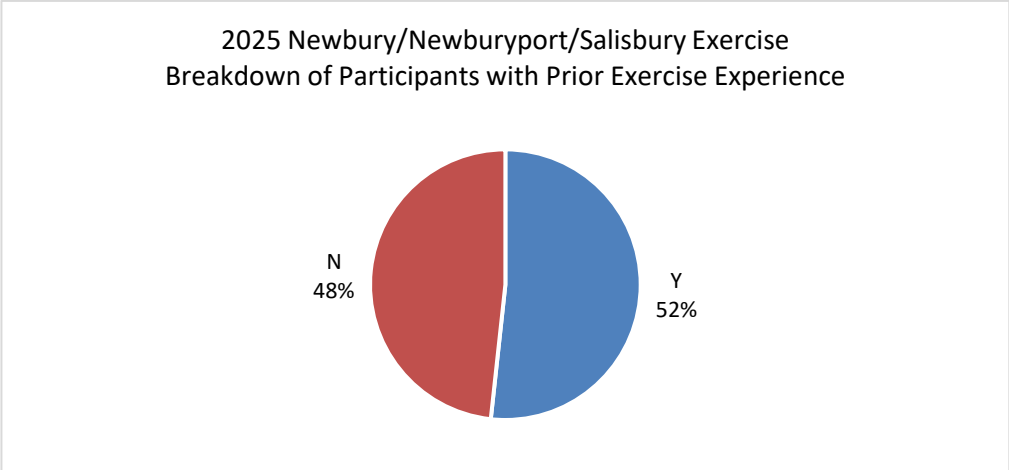

Figure 9: Previous Exercise Participation

Table 6: List of Resources

List of Resources			
Agency	**Resource**	**Kind**	**Exercise Function**
Newburyport FD	29' Safeboat	Vessel	Safety/Support
Newburyport HM	25' Safeboat	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Newburyport HM	25' Safeboat	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Salisbury FD	25' Safeboat	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Salisbury FD	Oil spill response trailer	Trailer	Boom Deployment
Newburyport FD	Oil spill response trailer	Trailer	Trailer Training
Amesbury PD	Equipment	Drone	Support
Salisbury FD	Equipment	Drone	Support