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

Berkley, Dighton, Freetown

After-Action Report

September 10, 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 Berkley/Dighton/Freetown Geographic Response Strategy Exercise
Exercise Date	September 10, 2025
Scope	This full-scale exercise was planned for approximately six hours at the Dighton Fire Department. Exercise play was limited to Shaw's Boat Yard and the surrounding areas.
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 Taunton River and the adjacent shorelines. The Berkley, Dighton, and Freetown Fire Departments and Police/Harbormasters will utilize various common Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) tactics to protect sensitive resources in these areas.
Sponsor	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Participating Organizations	Participating organizations included: • Berkley Fire Department • Berkley Police Department • Dighton Fire Department • Dighton Harbormaster • Dighton Police Department • Freetown Fire Department • MassDEP • United States Coast Guard Sector SENE • 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 learn about marine anchor systems

Figure 2: Participants connect sections of boom

Figure 3: Participants learn about the equipment in each response trailer

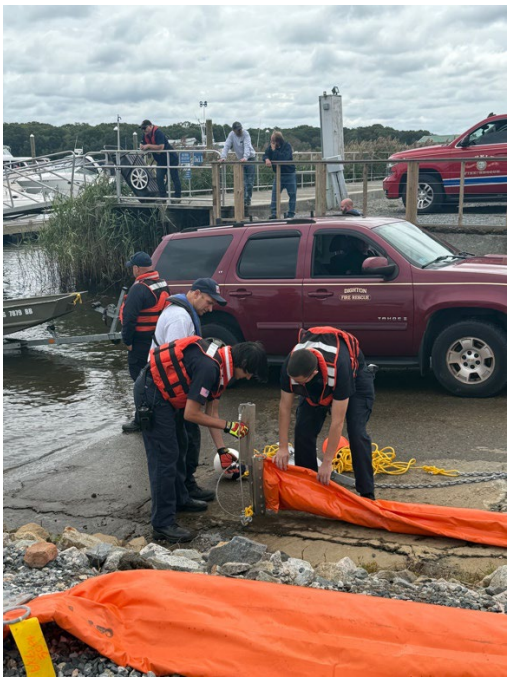

Figure 4: Participants connect a towing bridle to prepare boom for deployment

Photos courtesy of Nuka Research & Planning Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exercise Planning

In preparation for the Berkley/Dighton/Freetown 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 Dighton Police Department Community Room (1458 Somerset Ave, Dighton, MA, 02715) on Thursday, August 7th, from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM.

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
Jason Perry	Chief	Berkley Fire Department
Chris Maguy	Chief	Dighton Fire Department
Ryan Richards	Deputy Chief	Dighton Police Department

Outcomes

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

- **Exercise Date:** Wednesday, September 10th
- **Classroom Location:** Dighton Police Station (1458 Somerset Ave, Dighton, MA 02715)
- **Deployment Location(s):** Shaw's Boat Yard (86 Main St, Dighton, MA 02715)
- **Additional Resources:** Dighton PD Drone; USCG MSU New Bedford Drone
- **Deployment Notes:** Shallow and rocky spots throughout deployment area

Final Planning Meeting

A Final Planning Meeting (FPM) was held via Zoom on Wednesday, September 3, 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
Jason Perry	Chief	Berkley Fire Department
Art Newhook	Harbormaster	Berkley Harbormaster
Chris Maguy	Chief	Dighton Fire Department
Samuel Pine	Captain	
Ronald Marino	Harbormaster	Dighton Harbormaster
Ryan Richards	Deputy Chief	Dighton Police Department
Christopher Magan	Sargeant	
Harrie Ashley	Chief	Freetown Fire Department

Outcomes

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

- Deploy and test a 200-300 ft containment tactic around moored vessel.
- Deploy and test a 200 ft diversion tactic off the pier at Shaw's Boat Yard.

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	22 mph, NE
Tidal conditions	Ebb tide
Water depth (approx.)	8-10 ft
Wave action & Current speed (approx.)	Strong currents
Vessel traffic	None
Harbor mooring field density	Minimal
Other observations	Light rain

The following deployment activities were completed:

- Deployed a 200 ft diversion tactic from Shaw's Boat Yard and deployed a 200 ft containment tactic around a nearby floating dock (directly in front of the boat ramp) instead of a moored vessel.

Figure 5: Exercise Tactic 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 well together to prepare and stage two 200ft sections of boom, load the appropriate number of marine anchor systems onto each vessel, then transfer the boom from the shore to awaiting vessels for tow.

Strength: Work vessels safely and efficiently towed boom from the shoreline to a nearby floating dock for the containment tactic, and to the northeastern corner of Shaw's Boat Yard for the diversion tactic.

Strength: Command staff, vessel, and shoreside personnel worked together to coordinate an initial plan for deployment and adjustments to marine anchor systems to overcome strong current and wind conditions at both locations.

Figure 6: Safety Officer provides a briefing to responders prior to deployment

Observation: Due to factors such as strong current and winds and minimal horsepower, the Zodiac experienced challenges approaching the shoreside anchoring location for the diversion tactic (adjacent to the northernmost finger of Shaw's Boat Yard).

Analysis: Strong current and winds, combined with the limited horsepower of the towing vessel (Zodiac) made the diversion booming operation difficult - especially after the vessel turned the northeastern corner of the Boat Yard and approached the area for anchoring. These factors also led to the diversion boom pushing up against docked vessels during the anchoring operation. After several unsuccessful attempts to approach the location from different angles to avoid boom contact with these nearby vessels, the Zodiac eventually passed its towing line off to a larger work vessel with more horsepower. After the larger work vessel made several attempts to re-position the array, crews continued to observe boom drifting towards the nearby docks. It was at this point that exercise controllers made the decision to cease operations. During the hot wash, participants noted that it may have been more effective to offload boom directly from the shoreline instead of towing it to the site of the diversion tactic. This would have helped to avoid challenges experienced in dealing with strong current and wind conditions.

Figure 7: Vessel crews complete deployment of the containment tactic around a nearby floating dock

Observation: Due to miscalculations related to nearby water depths, anchor lines prepared for the containment array were not long enough to properly secure deployed marine anchors and position the 200 feet of containment boom.

Analysis: Command staff initially miscalculated water depths near the floating dock, impacting the ability for vessel crews to effectively set marine anchors (due to short anchor lines) after towing containment boom to the deployment location. Future exercises would benefit from pre-deployment site assessments to identify tide-dependent water depths, and to ensure anchor line lengths are sufficient for the operating area.

Figure 8: Vessel crews tow the diversion boom against strong currents

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: Command staff quickly developed and communicated deployment plans to all participants, then assigned roles and responsibilities for vessel and shoreside crews.

Observation: Command staff provided clear and concise information during the operations and safety briefings, but participants underestimated the impacts of water depths, strong winds, and strong currents on the feasibility of the two deployment evolutions.

Analysis: Water depths, strong winds, and strong currents had impacts on the overall efficiency of the on-water operation and added strain on vessel crews throughout the towing and deployment of both arrays. Future operations and safety briefings should include detailed weather and water condition information. This information can be gathered through pre-deployment site surveys conducted by command staff.

Figure 9: Command Staff uses ICS resources to prepare for the operations briefing

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 a common radio frequency as the primary communications channel for the exercise and directed participants to join the channel during the Operations and Safety briefings.

Observation: Command staff experienced occasional gaps in radio communications with some vessel crews, limiting the ability to relay deployment changes and coordinate adjustments on the water.

Analysis: Communication gaps had minor impacts that slowed the completion of tactical adjustments. Reliable communication is essential when multiple agencies are involved, particularly under challenging environmental conditions. Future responses should include radio checks, identify backup frequencies, and provide spare radios if needed.

PARTICIPANTS & RESOURCES

Table 5: List of Participants

Participating Organizations	
Town of Berkley, MA	**Participant Count**
Berkley Fire Department	8
Berkley Police Department	3
Town of Dighton, MA	
Dighton Fire Department	7
Dighton Harbormaster	2
Dighton Police Department	1
Town of Freetown, MA	
Freetown Fire Department	5
TOTAL TOWN/CITY PARTICIPANTS	**26**
State	
Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)	2
Nuka Research and Planning Group, LLC (contractor for MassDEP)	2
Moran Environmental Recovery (contractor for MassDEP)	3
Federal	
United States Coast Guard Sector SENE	1
TOTAL	**34**

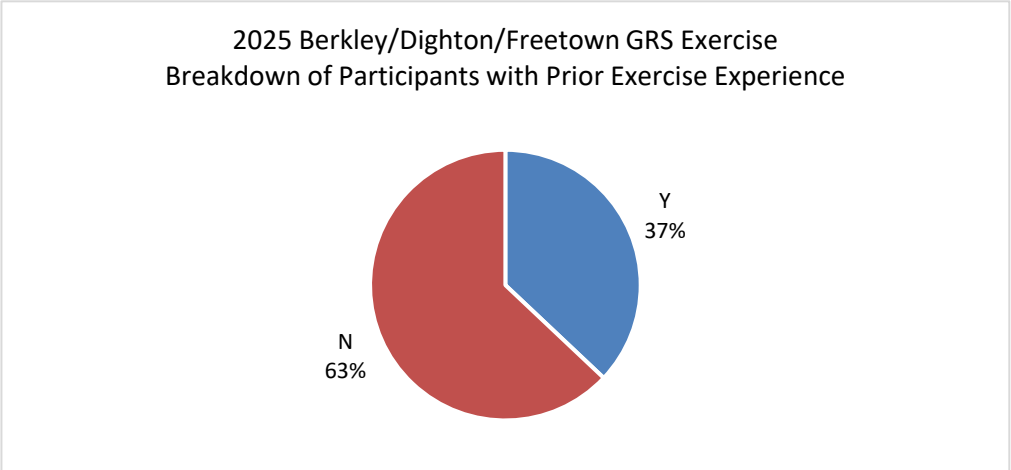

Figure 10: Previous Exercise Participation

Table 6: List of Resources

List of Resources			
Agency	**Resource**	**Kind**	**Exercise Function**
Dighton FD	John Boat	Vessel	Safety
Dighton PD	21' Boston Whaler	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Berkley PD/Harbormaster	21' Parker Center Console	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Berkley FD	12' Zodiac	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Freetown FD	14' Boston Whaler	Vessel	Boom Deployment
Berkley FD	Oil spill response trailer	Trailer	Support
Dighton FD	Oil spill response trailer	Trailer	Support