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Standard Practice for Reporting Visual Observations of Oil on Water¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F 1779; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers methods of reporting and recording visual observations of oil on water and related ~~activities and phenomena~~ response activities.

1.2 This practice applies only to visual observations of oil on water from an airplane or helicopter. While a similar set of codes could be used for classifying oil on beaches, this subject is not discussed in this practice. It does not cover the use of remote-sensing equipment from aircraft, which is discussed in a separate standard. This does not include observations of dispersed oil.

1.3 This practice is applicable for all types of oil under a variety of environmental and geographical situations.

1.4 Visual observations of oil on water from the air involve a number of safety issues associated with the operation of airplanes or helicopters at low altitudes. These are not dealt with in this practice, but the observer should be aware of the hazards of such operations.

~~1.5 This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.~~

1.5 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values in parentheses are mathematical conversions to inch-pound units that are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

~~1.6 This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.~~

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⁺This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F20 on Hazardous Substances and Oil Spill Response and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F20.16 on Surveillance and Tracking.

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2. Significance and Use

2.1 This practice can be used by surveillance and tracking staff to report visual observations to the clients of visual observations. The data produced from such observations will provide the basis for preparing maps of the oil-slick location.

2.2 This practice provides a procedure for reporting the visual observation of oil on water in a systematic manner and in a common format that can be readily understood by both observers and users of visual oil-spill observation maps.

2.3 This practice deals with the possibility that materials other than oil might be confused with oil when using visual observation methods. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

F 2534 Guide for Visually Estimating Oil Spill Thickness on Water

3. Observational Methods

3.1 The basic information needed from a visual observation program includes the slick size and location, as well as its characteristics and shape. The location and some aspects of the effectiveness of a response operation can be easily determined from an aerial platform. Reports on the presence of wildlife and the proximity of oil to environmentally sensitive areas are useful information that can be generated from overflights.

3.2 Observers of oil on water will generally use either a helicopter or a small fixed-wing airplane. The planes shall be capable of slow-speed flight (120 to 240 km/h; 60 to 120 knots) for extended periods of time and have good forward and side visibility. The aircraft shall have adequate range and endurance consistent with the size and location of the spill.

3.3 If possible, two observers should be used, one on the port and the other on the starboard side of the aircraft. Provision shall be made for the two observers to communicate readily between themselves and with the flight crew. This can be accomplished by using standard aviation headphones and noise-cancelling microphones connected to an aircraft intercom system. Such equipment is readily available on the commercial market.

3.4 Standard maps shall be provided to the observers, so that their data can be easily transferred to a single map or map set for reporting and dissemination. These maps can be based on marine charts, topographic maps or special maps produced for the spill. Useful scales vary from 1:10000 to 1:50000. It is difficult to plot information to the required accuracy using maps of a larger scale.

3.5 The flight path shall be shown on all maps. An initial proposed flight path should be prepared prior to the flight. During the flight, deviations from this plan may be necessary in order to observe the total area of the slick.

3.6 Typical flight altitudes range from (100 to 1000 m (300 to 3000 ft) depending on the nature of the spill and on the cloud ceiling at flight time. There are flight safety considerations associated with low-altitude flying.

3.7 The best angle to observe an oil slick is directly above it looking straight down. This is known as a nadir observation. The flight path should be adjusted, wherever possible, to provide observers with a nadir view of the slick. For most fixed-wing aircraft, it is not possible to observe directly downwards, and therefore the flight path should be chosen to allow for observation of the spill at as near the vertical as possible. Significance and Use

3.1 This practice can be used by surveillance and tracking staff to report visual observations. The data produced from such observations will provide the basis for preparing maps of the oil-slick location.

3.2 This practice provides a procedure for reporting the visual observation of oil on water in a systematic manner and in a common format.

3.3 This practice deals with the possibility that materials other than oil might be confused with oil when using visual observation methods.

4. Methods of Reporting

4.1 Observational Methods

4.1 The basic information needed from a visual observation program includes the slick size and location, as well as its characteristics and shape. The location (preferably determined by GPS) and some aspects of the effectiveness of a response operation can be easily determined from an aerial platform. Reports on the presence of wildlife and the proximity of oil to environmentally sensitive areas are useful information that can be generated from overflights.

4.2 Observers of oil on water will generally use either a helicopter or a small fixed-wing airplane. The planes shall be capable of slow-speed flight (120 to 240 km/h; 60 to 120 knots) for extended periods of time and have good forward and side visibility. The aircraft shall have adequate range and endurance consistent with the size and location of the spill.

4.3 Standard maps shall be provided to the observers, so that their data can be easily transferred to a single map or map set for reporting and dissemination. The same maps should be used by the command team and the observers. These maps can be based on marine charts, topographic maps or special maps produced for the spill. Useful scales vary from 1:10000 to 1:50000. It is difficult to plot information to the required accuracy using maps of a larger scale.

4.4 The flight path shall be shown on all maps. The actual flight path should be recorded on GPS and can be transferred to the map(s) later. An initial proposed flight path should be prepared prior to the flight. During the flight, deviations from this plan may be necessary in order to observe the total area of the slick.

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

4.5 Typical flight altitudes range from 100 to 1000 m (300 to 3000 ft) depending on the type of the spill and on the cloud ceiling at flight time. There are flight safety considerations associated with low-altitude flying.

4.6 The best angle to observe an oil slick is directly above it looking straight down. This is known as a nadir observation. The flight path should be adjusted, wherever possible, to provide observers with a nadir view of the slick. For most fixed-wing aircraft, it is not possible to observe directly downwards, and therefore the flight path should be chosen to allow for observation of the spill at as near the vertical as possible.

5. Methods of Reporting

5.1 *Reporting Needs*— There are a number of characteristics of the slick that shall be reported in order to provide the user of visual observations with the appropriate amount of information. The following characteristics shall be reported for each slick that is observed during a reconnaissance flight. These observations are a snap-shot in time. Both the location and characteristics of an oil slick change rapidly. In order to be useful for responders, the information should be available a short time after it is obtained (typically less than 3 h).

4.2

5.2 *Color of Slick*— This shall be reported as a color code, as follows:

4.2.1

5.2.1 *Brown or Black*—*B*.

4.2.2 Brown or Black with a red tinge signifying presence of an *Emulsion* or mousse— *E*.

4.2.3

5.2.3 *Rainbow sheen* —*R*.

4.2.4 *Grey or Silver Grey sheen*—

5.2.4 *Grey or Silver Grey sheen*—*G*.

4.3

5.3 *Percentage Coverage and Character of Slick*—Percentage of area as described that is covered by oil.

4.4

5.4 The character of the slick shall be noted such as follows:

4.4.1

5.4.1 *Windrows*—*W*.

4.4.2

5.4.2 *Continuous*—*C*.

4.4.3

5.4.3 *Tar Balls*—*T*.

4.4.4

5.4.4 *Pancakes*—*P*.

4.5 The eight parameters in 4.2

5.5 The eight parameters in 5.2 and 4.4-5.4 give a description of the oil slick.

4.6

5.6 *Slick Features*— If the leading edge of the slick can be identified, it should be noted as a heavy line.

4.7 The preceding data complete the description of the slick, as it would be placed on a base map.

4.8.5.8 *Other Properties*— There are a number of secondary related features that can be easily observed during a reconnaissance flight, and should be reported on the surveillance map, if appropriate. This recording of such information yields additional useful data from a surveillance flight, but should not be regarded as a primary function of the flight. These observations include:

4.5.8.1 Mechanical response operations (such as booms and skimmers)—*M*.

4.5.8.2 Dispersant or chemical response operations—*D*.

4.5.8.3 In-situ burning (Fire) response operations—*F*.

4.5.8.4 Shoreline cleanup in the area— *S*.

4.5.8.5 Animals or birds seen in area— *A*.

4.5.8.6 Wildlife Habitat in area— *H*.

4.8.7 *Ocean features*—

5.8.7 *Ocean features*—*O* :

4.8.8 *EXtra features such as ice, debris*—(*such as convergences*).

5.8.8 *EXtra features such as ice, debris*—*X*.

4.9 Each 5.9 Each element shall be separated by a forward slash (/) except for other properties which are included as a group. Thus a slick could be described as **B/50/W/M**. This can be decoded as a slick containing Black oil with a 50 % coverage. The oil is in Windrows and a Mechanical response operation is being undertaken.

5. Voice Communications

5.1