Oil Spills in Mangroves

PLANNING & RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapters
1. Mangrove Ecology  9
2. Oil Toxicity   23
3. Response    36
4. Recovery and Restoration  48
5. Case Studies    56
Glossary    69

Figures
1.1 World map showing mangrove distribution zones   9
1.2 Mangrove distribution in the U.S. Gulf Coast   10
1.3 Three species of mangroves
   a. Conocarpus   10
   b. Laguncularia   10
   c. Avicennia    11
1.4. Rhizophora trees in Florida, with propagules    12
1.5 Mangrove leaf showing salt crystals    13
1.6 Rhizophora tree showing prop roots    14
1.7 Mangrove forest with hurricane damage in Honduras    17
2.1 Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico jet fuel spill    27
2.2 Oil in mangroves with dead bird   28
3.1 Oil impacts to different types of mangrove forests   37
3.2 Oil stranded in mangrove islets in Tampa Bay    38
3.3 Worker removing heavy oil by vacuuming   43
4.1 Planting Rhizophora harrisonii propagules in Ecuador   49
5.1 Oiled crab and snail on red mangrove trunk at the Peck Slip spill   59

Tables
1.1 Common mangrove species    10
2.1 Responses of mangrove forests to oil spills   28
3.1 Recommendations for response techniques in oiled mangroves   44
4.1 Mangrove impacts and recovery at eight oil spills    51
This report is intended to assist those who work in spill response and planning in regions where mangrove ecosystems are an important part of the coastline. By understanding the basics of the ecology of these forests and learning from past oil spills in mangroves, we can better plan for, protect, and respond to spills that may threaten them. Mangroves often border coastlines where coral reefs live offshore, and these two ecosystems are closely linked. Mangroves filter and trap excess sediment that could harm coral, and coral reefs protect shorelines where mangroves grow from excessive wave energy. Both habitats can be adversely impacted by oil spills, and spill responders must often consider tradeoffs between land-based and offshore resources during a response. This guide is a companion to *Oil Spills in Coral Reefs: Planning and Response Considerations*.

This is not intended to be a specific guide for choosing cleanup methods, as many comprehensive versions of these exist already. Rather, we summarize current research on mangroves from the perspective of those who may need to make decisions about response in mangroves and present the information in an accessible format for people with some science or response background. Experienced responders unfamiliar with mangroves may want background on mangrove ecology, while biologists may want an overview of oil toxicity and mangroves and response and cleanup applied to mangrove ecosystems. We have organized the topics by chapters, each of which can be read as a standalone, with additional references provided at the end of each chapter. A glossary defines specialized terms.

Chapter 1, mangrove ecology, provides an overview of mangrove forests, their associated communities, and how they respond to various natural and human stresses. Chapter 2, oil toxicity to mangroves, reviews the research available on oil toxicity and impacts to mangroves. In Chapter 3, we discuss general guidance for responding to spills in mangroves and provide specific considerations for cleanup measures. Chapter 4 discusses long-term recovery of mangroves from oil spill impacts and restoration techniques and approaches. Lastly, in Chapter 5 we have compiled several case studies that illustrate a range of issues from oil spills impacting various regions.

Though mangrove forests are in many ways very adaptable ecosystems, and are inherently able to respond to physical changes in their environment, they are highly vulnerable to oil toxicity and can be further damaged by many types of cleanup activities. Thus, we must approach any type of response or restoration activities in mangroves with knowledge and caution. The information in this document will, we hope, help to minimize environmental impacts in mangroves when oil spills threaten them.