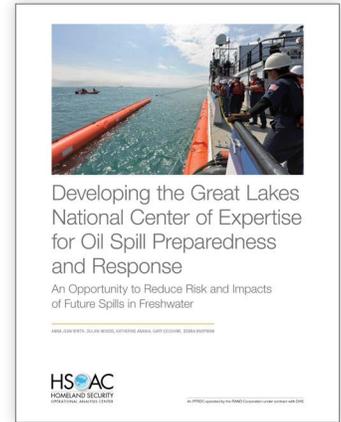


Developing the Great Lakes National Center of Expertise for Oil Spill Preparedness and Response

An Opportunity to Reduce Risk and Impacts of Future Spills in Freshwater

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Oil spills threaten the Great Lakes—the largest body of surface fresh water on the planet. In 2018, Congress passed a bill that directed the U.S. Coast Guard to establish the Great Lakes National Center of Expertise for Oil Spill Preparedness and Response (GL NCOE). The authors of this report make recommendations for the near- and long-term trajectories of the GL NCOE, as well as its staffing needs, potential partnerships, and location.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What should be the primary activities of the GL NCOE?
- With whom should the GL NCOE partner to help conduct center activities and fulfill Coast Guard marine environmental protection goals?
- What are key near-, mid-, and long-term goals for the GL NCOE?
- How should the GL NCOE utilize its resources to succeed in its primary activities?
- Where should the GL NCOE be located?

KEY FINDINGS

- The GL NCOE can be the key facilitator of translating cutting edge scientific and technological advances from those who are conducting the research to the operators.

- The GL NCOE can serve as a repository of knowledge and a coordinator of research across organizations to close gaps and advance the scientific and engineering agenda related to the concerns unique to freshwater oil-spill response.
- There are more than 75 partners with which the GL NCOE would need to coordinate to conduct key activities.
- Drawing from the expertise of partners by having representatives of those organizations join the GL NCOE could provide necessary expertise and promote partnership building.
- The GL NCOE can cover all or most areas of expertise and necessary skills with a minimum staffing footprint of one experienced Coast Guard officer and two or three civilians.
- Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, meets the infrastructure criteria specified by Congress and is home to three institutions of higher learning with adequate research facilities. Other locations could meet the legislative criteria, depending on the importance placed on research-institution characteristics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Balancing the prioritization of resources will be a key challenge for the GL NCOE. After the operational expenses of the GL NCOE, the remainder of the annual budget could be applied to personnel, purchasing of equipment, or research. All three of these categories will support the activities of the GL NCOE and its long-term goals, but choosing the balance of funding among them will require careful consideration of the GL NCOE's performance goals in the near and longer terms. Similarly, managing the bandwidth of center personnel as a limited resource will be important to meet the Coast Guard's priorities. Personnel should consider championing activities strategically and balancing research initiatives with demands for translating the science, convening, and coordination.
- •The GL NCOE is mandated by legislation to do many things—training, coordinating across partners, equipment modernization, and others—and runs the risk of getting pulled in too many directions. In the first few years of the center's operation, leadership might find it most productive to focus on prioritizing activities and demonstrating clear progress in a few areas rather than aiming for limited progress across all.
- •Coordination with partners will be a key task of the GL NCOE to, among other things, avoid duplication of effort where the GL NCOE overlaps with the missions of other organizations. However, there are far too many stakeholders to significantly engage with them all at the GL NCOE's current funding level. Developing scoped engagement strategies will be necessary to conserve GL NCOE's staff bandwidth.