

UMR Hazardous Spills Coordination Group Fall Meeting

December 18, 2025 (virtual)

Kurt Levetzow welcomed participants and began introductions. Participants and their affiliation are listed at the end of this document.

Mark Ellis gave an overview of the group for new attendees. The UMR Hazardous Spills Coordination Group serves as a forum for interagency coordination and helps partners with spill response planning, training, and exercising along the Upper Mississippi River (UMR). UMRBA coordinates the group and supports activities carried out by its members.

Agency Updates

Iowa

Kurt Levetzow said Iowa DNR Field Office 1 had 27 reportable incidents. Southeast Iowa saw 34 incidents, but none impacted the river. One fall manure spill led to a fish kill in a tributary stream but was non-detectable at the Mississippi River. One of Levetzow's staff resigned but otherwise staffing has been stable.

Minnesota

Dorene Fier-Tucker said that Minnesota had 4,621 spill reports in 2025, with at least ten involving the UMR. One notable incident was a December 2023 truck crash adjacent to the river that spilled 2,300 gallons of herbicide and 100 gallons of diesel. Recently MPCA found that contamination has reached four nearby drinking water wells and the river. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the agency responsible for pesticides, leads the remediation. Fier-Tucker shared photos of the incident, showing the truck that rolled over onto CPKC railroad tracks. West Central Environmental Consultants is working with the responsible party and landowners now. Bill Lazarz said that the chemical cleanup will be a long-term project.

Jayson Schrank is now an inspector in the MPCA St. Paul office. MPCA's Inspection Section has been doing inspections and is expanding to include railroads and trucking facilities, over-the-road response plans, and aboveground storage tanks. The Section works within the Minnesota 115e Statute. There has been a soft launch over the last two months to get the program active.

Missouri

Rick Gann said that Missouri has had no major spills impacting the river since the last meeting. However, in August there was a helicopter service tending to high-voltage lines across the river that hit the power line and crashed onto a barge, killing both crew members. The helicopter crashed on

a high-pressure barge with flammable contents but no fire was ignited. Minimal amounts of material reached the river. Downstream drinking water operators were notified. Adam Vrabec noted that the barge was a benzene hauler.

Wisconsin

Kaylin Felix said there were no updates to report for Wisconsin DNR.

US Coast Guard

LTJG Shannon Young said MSD St. Paul transferred in two new members from Detroit and New York who are already pollution qualified. UMR navigation locks are now closed for the season. USCG staff are looking at over-the-water illegal transfers. Diesel Dogs has been towing without a plan and Vesbach is under scrutiny. Young asked members to contact USCG if they know of any similar activity in their area.

David Morrison added that the July 2025 update of the USCG's Incident Management Handbook has been released.

USEPA Region 5

Andy Maguire checked spill call metrics and shared the agency online dashboard. There have been 2,235 reports and 34 On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) responses in 2025. Staff have been leaving following changes in the Administration, including OSCs and upper management. With the current hiring freeze, Maguire said it is unclear when these positions will get backfilled.

Barbi Lee added that the agency hasn't yet received the same level of funding as FY 2024. This has impacted the RRT5 website, which needs some updates. The website has all sub-area plans hosted by USEPA Region 5 and some from adjacent regions. Maguire noted that response capacity is still good but there has been talk about changing response posture at the national level. Statutory response work, such as OPA and CERCLA, will continue but other programs might change. Agency staff will keep partners informed as new information comes out.

Mark Ellis gave an overview of UMR Pool 16 response strategy validation. In early October, USEPA, Iowa DNR, Illinois EPA, and Muscatine County visited potential response strategy sites downstream of the Quad Cities. Crews visited each site to verify the validity of the draft strategies, record data, and take photos. The strategy sites are now available within the Illinois Map Viewer on the RRT5 website.

USEPA Region 7

Joe Davis said Region 7 has also lost some senior staff. Echoing Andy Maguire, he said that staff may have new response postures and rely more on the states to lead responses. Region 7 did not have many responses along the UMR this year.

Davis deployed to a fire that destroyed a facility in Louisiana near New Orleans along Lake Pontchartrain. The facility had several million gallons of oils and lubricants in aboveground storage

tanks. In the process of firefighting, petroleum and millions of gallons of PFAS firefighting runoff water flowed into the adjacent marsh and state scenic river. USEPA had to federalize the response when the facility ran out of insurance money, which covered only the initial firefighting. Operations ran at the facility and on the water. Davis saw many unique qualities in this response. It was the first time he had seen the National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC) activated for a Clean Water Act response. The NPFC considers the mix of materials in this incident a chemical, not an oil, for which it was established. Answering a question, Davis said that dilution in the river kept PFAS levels low but it was detected.

USFWS

Aleshia Kenney said USFWS had no updates to report since the last meeting.

USACE

Jeff McCrery said USACE Rock Island also had no significant reports.

Illinois American Water

Ted Kratschmer spent the summer dealing with Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) near Davenport and St. Louis. Staff were downstream of the helicopter and barge incident, mentioned by Rick Gann in the Missouri update, to monitor water at the public water supply intakes.

Mapping and Planning Updates

Inland Sensitivity Atlas (ISA)

Mark Ellis described the ISA for new participants. It is an atlas of GIS data depicting potential spill sources, sensitive receptors, and response-related information. It covers the six states of USEPA Region 5 and adjacent counties across the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The ISA can be used to support response and planning by agencies, response organizations, and regulated industry. With the federal shutdown in October, funding for the current fiscal year has been stalled. The scheduled October update was cancelled but another update will be submitted to USEPA in January 2026. The ISA map viewer can be accessed at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=14441.

Ellis gave an overview of a UMRBA story map set up to enhance emergency notifications to Mississippi River users, see <https://umrba.org/informal-public-use-areas>. UMRBA created a simple database of areas along the UMR where the public tend to congregate. The data can be used to improve connection to river users.

Great Rivers Sub-area

Valerie Wilder said the sub-area committee met in October with 20 folks attending from three USEPA Regions, USCG, state DNRs, Missouri State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), and counties. Wilder presented a mercury spill cleanup action in St. Louis at the meeting. Tetra Tech,

USEPA contractors, reported that the Mississippi River Viewer will be moved to Experience Builder, a new GIS platform replacing an older platform on which the viewer was built. This move will combine several different USEPA Region 7 viewers into one. The sub-area website is found at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=8554.

Wilder noted that there was a fire at the CMR mineral processing plant in Fredericktown, Missouri, in October 2024. The facility rebuild currently underway will include an adjacent fire station.

Greater Saint Louis Sub-area

Anna Dismang will offer a Transportation Rail Incident Preparedness and Response (TRIPR) training in 2026. Missouri SEMA is preparing for World Cup 2026 air monitoring. The sub-area plan can be found at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=11518.

Adam Vrabec shared that the sub-area plan was distributed two weeks ago. Joe Krauska sent an update by email to note that the updated plan will get posted on the USEPA OSC website on Friday, December 19, 2025.

Minneapolis/St. Paul Sub-area

David Morrison said the sub-area is looking to prioritize the most important response sites along the river for containment and collection. Amongst the hundreds of existing sites, this priority list will direct response. We have greatly expanded the historical seven-county metro area to include a large part of central Minnesota with many facilities, railroads, and industry. Expansion of the area means needing to expand the coverage of response strategies.

USEPA is currently updating the Incident Action Plan (IAP), which is an appendix of the main body of the plan. The IAP is mostly used as a template for planning and exercises. It is used less for actual responses because facilities often have their own plan or a contractor. Thus, it is now being simplified to train people about objectives, response structure, and more.

Morrison added that USCG has its Maritime Security Program with grants for counties, sheriffs, and industry, who are getting grants for new boat access ramps, response vessels, and more. He would like to include them in exercises and planning.

NOAA will put on virtual Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Technique (SCAT) training classes in March 2026. SCAT is the national standard for shoreline cleanup in an oil spill.

Quad Cities Sub-Area

Joe Davis said the Quad Cities Sub-area plan is on the OSC website, found at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=11807. A link to the Mississippi River Viewer is found at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=12619. Region 7 plans take the five sub-area sites and combine them into one viewer. Accounts created in the old format will roll over into the new format.

USEPA will look at training next summer or fall for multi-agency actions within the sub-area. The START task order got funded to set up training. Davis shared pictures of boom training with local fire departments from summer 2025. Barbi Lee added that the USCG MSD Quad Cities is also working to organize an exercise. The initial planning meeting will be held in January, 2026.

USEPA Region 5

Adam Vrabec noted that USEPA Region 5 partnered with Illinois EPA in 2025 to train state OSCs at Carlisle Lake to simulate pipeline or railroad releases. Training included Level B hazmat with suiting up, equipment demonstrations, and wildlife recovery with Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) actions. This was followed by a tabletop exercise with local agencies. There were 55 participants at the event, which Illinois EPA would like to hold annually. Many rural volunteer teams lack resources, so it provided a good networking event.

Case Study: Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal Asphalt Spill

Andy Maguire described the location of the incident, Apex Oil subsidiary Petroleum Fuel & Terminal (PF&T). PF&T is an asphalt barge-loading terminal along the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal (CSSC) at the Village of Forest View, Illinois. The CSSC was created to reverse flow of the Chicago River to the Illinois River instead of into Lake Michigan, Chicago's water supply. There is an overflow storm sewer from the village, under the terminal containment area, to the canal. Within the containment area is a manhole at ground level, which constitutes a Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures (SPCC) violation. This design allowed what would have been a contained release to spread out of the facility. The PF&T terminal is regulated by both USEPA and USCG. Overwater transfers to the first valve inside the facility are regulated by USCG; the release valve was inside the facility, so response was led by USEPA.

The initial release happened in February 2025 and response actions lasted through the entire year. The terminal southwest of Chicago handles and transfers roofing asphalt. The incident began when a valve within containment released asphalt. PF&T initially reported the release of 6,000 bbls, of which 1,000 found its way through a storm sewer into the canal. Further investigation showed that the entire contents of the 10,000 bbls tank was released. The cause of the release is still under investigation but may have been done intentionally by a disgruntled employee, who has been arrested.

Maguire explained that Asphalt qualifies as an oil under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Also, the CSSC is a navigable waterway. The specific gravity of the product is 1 to 1.1 at 39 degrees F. As it warms the specific gravity lowers and it can float. Hydrogen Sulfide is a minor air concern.

The facility outfall is just upstream of the barge transfer dock. In February, cleanup captured 1,260 bbls from the ground and 1,591 bbls from the canal. Excavators were used to pull asphalt from the bed of the canal. Soundings were used to compare against historic depth soundings; when no difference was seen, it was determined to be cleaned up. PF&T signed a consent order on May 1,

2025, which stated the FOSC had authority regarding response decisions. On May 9, a fire at the facility caused a tank roof to collapse but there was no release out of containment. On May 12, Ingredion, a chemical plant downstream, reported tar in their process water intake. Investigation showed a lot of asphalt in the canal, tracing back to PF&T. Impacts were then observed 25 miles downstream to Joliet, IL. There are other industrial intakes and a hydroelectric dam along this reach.

On May 15, USEPA Region 5 entered Unified Command with Illinois EPA and PF&T. Many coordinating agencies were involved, including:

- Village of Forest View
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Chicago (MWRDC)
- US Coast Guard
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- US Geological Service
- Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources
- Illinois State Historic Preservation Office
- Other facilities and municipalities along the CSSC

Maguire shared pictures of the spill site and cleanup activities. He said blobs of asphalt emerged from the CSSC bottom when weather began to warm. The thick asphalt was cut with chain saws into manageable sizes for removal. A clamshell excavator was used to pull asphalt off the canal bed. The material had a consistency like taffy. Hand tools such as pool skimmers proved to be very effective at pulling material out of the water. An innovative and useful tactic to catch material was to use seine nets. Weights pull the net to the bottom, then boats are used to cinch up the net and catch loose material in the water column. Illinois DNR agreed to let fishermen who were normally busy catching invasive carp be pulled in to support the response. To release material from the canal bed, a tugboat was used to prop wash the bed at the terminal dock and stir up material for collection. A sparge system was also built by a local barge operator and used to dislodge material from the canal bed.

Over 250 oiled wildlife were captured, mainly snakes and birds. Around 80 were cleaned and released in the nearby Des Plaines River.

With warmer weather, the asphalt in the storm sewer began to flow out. A coffer dam was set to block any outflow. This also proved useful later while cleaning out the storm sewer. Over 73,000 gallons of oily water were recovered from the storm sewer. The storm sewer was cleaned by heating the asphalt and letting it flow to the outfall. High-pressure water was used to dislodge material from the sides. The storm sewer connection was kept for the village but the manholes needed to be sealed to comply with regulations. The village can unseal them for inspections as needed.

UC characterized cleanup endpoints for shoreline, surface water, and water column. These were tested by USGS using a multibeam sonar to detect oil on the canal bottom. High resolution bathymetry was used to compare findings. Seine nets were used again to characterize the water column. Three passes were run to verify an absence of asphalt. Initial SCAT is now complete and monitoring will continue into 2026.

Sonar identified many other objects, which may be investigated by the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office.

Maguire shared the volumes of recovered material:

- February cleanup: 2,850 bbls of asphalt
- Since May re-emergence: 9,048 bbls
- Air monitoring saw no hydrogen sulfide detections.

The question of recovered material exceeding the capacity of the tank led NF&T to request identification. In the end, it proved impossible to separate the active spill material from legacy material in the CSSC.

Illinois EPA was in UC but the administrative order was only between the company and USEPA. The initial aims had USEPA involvement but the new agency posture means monitoring oversight will transfer to the state. USEPA will close out the order and let IEPA carry on with monitoring.

Responding to a question, Maguire said there were fish kills during the response but none can be attributed to this spill by the DNR. During the response there were some sewage overflows from the WWTP that caused some kills. Dead fish at the electric fish barrier downstream were also not attributable to the spill.

UMR Activities

Mark Ellis gave a recap of response strategy development work done in UMR Pool 16. On October 4, UMRBA, USEPA, USCG, Illinois EPA, Iowa DNR, and Muscatine County (IA) visited potential response strategy sites in Pool 16. Crews validated the suggested strategies and recorded data and photos. The resulting strategies are now included in the Illinois Government Viewer on www.rtt5.org. Ellis said the group is looking ahead to doing Pools 17 and 18 where draft strategies are ready for validation. He asked partners to consider availability to do at least one of the Pools in the summer of 2026, pending funding.

Ellis said similar work can be done in the other planning gap in Pools 3 and 4 just downstream of the Twin Cities. This would call on Minnesota and Wisconsin for support. Another key area to consider is the lower reach of the Minnesota River. There is a National Wildlife Refuge downstream of pipeline crossings and FRP facilities in an area that has not been the focus of planning before. Dorene Fier-Tucker said MPCA would be interested in working in this area.

David Morrison said that Johnny Raising of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) may be able to help with pipeline exercises in the region. Contact jan.raisinger@dot.gov for exercise support.

Next Meeting

Participants decided to hold April 21, 2026 for the next meeting. It will likely be a hybrid meeting. Ellis will reach out to participants and other agencies to find potential locations for the in-person component.

Attendees:

Kurt Levetzow	Iowa DNR
Cindy Tranby	Minnesota DNR
Tyler Boley	Minnesota PCA
Dorene Fier-Tucker	Minnesota PCA
Dustin Helbling	Minnesota PCA
Janice Maine	Minnesota PCA
Carly McGinty	Minnesota PCA
Jason Moran	Minnesota PCA
David Satzke	Minnesota PCA
Jayson Schrank	Minnesota PCA
Mark Smith	Minnesota PCA
Rick Gann	Missouri DNR
Kaylin Felix	Wisconsin DNR
Lisa Olson-McDonald	Wisconsin Emergency Management
Jeff McCrery	USACE Rock Island District
Emily Byrnes	USEPA Region 5
Jude Huck-Reymond	USEPA Region 5
Barbi Lee	USEPA Region 5
Andy Maguire	USEPA Region 5
David Morrison	USEPA Region 5
Corey Peaslee	USEPA Region 5
Adam Vrabec	USEPA Region 5
Joe Davis	USEPA Region 7
Valerie Wilder	USEPA Region 7
Aleshia Kenney	USFWS Illinois/Iowa Field Office
Leslie Lueckenhoff	USFWS Missouri Field Office
Ted Kratschmer	Illinois/Iowa American Water
Bill Lazarz	WCEC / Wakota CAER
Mark Ellis	UMRBA