



Emergency boat towing system tested in dark

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An emergency towing system exercise held about one mile off Ulakta Head went off with a bit of a twist. Local responders executed the drill with a 700-foot container ship and both of the towing systems on site in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor in the dark.

The drill was run in order to see whether there were any standard operating procedures identified in last summer's exercise with the M/V Baltic Prosperity that needed fine-tuning. Experience with a larger, heavier vessel, typical of what navigates local waters and Unimak Pass, was also a goal.

The schedule for departure of the Horizon Anchorage dictated the 7 a.m. drill and allowed for the training to be held in dark hours just before dawn.

The dark shed light on operations, allowing successful experiments such as Steve Moreno attaching a sea anchor to the messenger line in order to better facilitate movement of a buoy from a ship to a waiting tug.

The operating manual will be updated, and individual pages released with the changes by NUKA Research in the next month. They will be made available to tow boat operators, freighters and cargo ships that regularly visit the Port of Dutch Harbor and the Aleutian Islands as soon as possible.

A day earlier, a helicopter exercise delivered the state's larger, heavier emergency towing system to the bow of the Horizon Anchorage. The Coast Guard crew from Kodiak made the intricate approach and drop look easy, even though the extra-long pendent and additional weight of the larger system caused unwanted motion of the load during the drill.

The city puts Horizon Lines LLC at the top of the list of organizations to thank. Danny Ellis and Mike Lynch were extremely positive and helpful in the effort to get the final authorization to use the 700-foot container ship for such an unusual purpose. The professional abilities of container ship captain Scott Anaker and his crew was noteworthy. Moreno, from the local Alaska Marine Pilots Association, was on the deck of the ship during the exercise just like last year, and his experience and skill were again a major factor in the success of the exercise. The local Coast Guard MSD office, sector Commander from Anchorage Capt. Mark Hamilton, and Commander Jim Robertson from District 17 headquarters in Juneau were on hand both days to observe and offer practical, field-tested advice. ADEC has been a major supporter from the start of this ongoing effort to better protect Unalaska and the Aleutians.

Thanks go out as well to local responders, and their generosity once again allowed for the use of NUKA Research to organize the logistics of planning the exercise through three teleconferences and a table-top drill the day before real exercises.

Dave Eley and Ben Bryant did a great job coordinating and updating all involved, and ran a very thorough debrief after the drill at City Hall.

John Brown and Gary Folley from ADEC flew in for the drill.

The tug Gyrfalcon was released by Pacific Towing and Horizon to take part in the drill, and captain Chris Iszler and crew were ready, willing and more than able to retrieve the system from the water and take the ship for a short tow before ending their participation.

Russell Johnson, port captain for Dunlap Towing, flew in to observe the exercise with captain Dave Alvestad and his crew onboard the James Dunlap. They provided a solid and timely deployment of the system to the ship. With a connection made, the tow was dropped and retrieved by the crew, allowing the ship to sail on schedule.

Tug crews in Unalaska did their jobs professionally and quickly. The Harbor Master's office plays the lead role in the immediate delivery of the system to tug and handles the line gun, storage and maintenance of the system. Harbor officers performed their duties quickly, easily and were always one step ahead of the ideas on how to make their job more efficient.

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