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## [SAN FRANCISCO](#) [Oil spill simulation drama off the Golden Gate](#) [Safe Seas 2006 is a drill to minimize damage to](#) [beaches](#)

- [Patrick Hoge, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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A cargo ship headed for San Francisco Bay collided Monday night with a tugboat hauling an oil barge about 12 miles outside the Golden Gate, and by Wednesday morning will spill 360,000 gallons of oil.

That is the premise for Safe Seas 2006, a three-day disaster drill led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that has drawn close to 400 officials from local, state and federal agencies to San Francisco this week.

"Most of the oil is in the water, and some of it is on its way to the beaches," said Lisa Symons of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program who is coordinating the exercise. "We want to prevent as much oil from hitting the beaches as we can. Some of it inevitably is going to hit the beaches."

According to the training simulation script, the M/V Blue Harp, a bulk freight cargo ship inbound from Long Beach, collided at 10:45 p.m. Monday with the Dottie, an oil tank barge carrying 1.8 million gallons of oil to Los Angeles. The Dottie was being pulled by an outbound tugboat, the Earnest Campbell, at the time of the collision.

By early today, only about 28,000 gallons of oil had been recovered from the ocean by the Marine Spill Response Corp., an oil company-funded nonprofit firm that has a fleet of 210-foot ships designed to suck oil out of seawater.

To minimize the damage, officials plan Wednesday to deploy more ships and aircraft from the Coast Guard and other agencies and new cutting-edge technology, including a computer-guided sonar torpedo to chart underwater hazards. Onshore, foot patrols will look for signs of oil.

The response to such a catastrophe "would tax everybody to the limits," said Rob Hughes, a spokesman for the California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response.

The goal would be to protect the region's economy and extraordinary environmentally sensitive areas ranging from the Gulf of Farallones National Marine Sanctuary to the mudflats within San Francisco Bay, officials said.

"There's a huge potential for impacts in this region on marine mammals and bird species," said Michael Ziccardi, a wildlife veterinarian and professor at UC Davis who works with the Oiled Wildlife Care

Network, a group of 25 organizations throughout Northern California that is funded by the state's Oil Spill Response Trust Fund.

In the past, the organization has saved up to 75 percent of contaminated birds by responding quickly, he said.

In 2002, when oil leaked out of a 49-year-old shipwreck 17 miles southwest of the Golden Gate in 174 feet of water, the network treated 1,000 birds over a 14-month period, he said.

The steamer Jacob Luckenbach sank in 1953 after it collided on a foggy night with its sister ship, the Hawaiian Pilot. The Luckenbach was loaded with railcars, jeeps, parts and fuel on its way to supply U.S. forces in the Korean War.

One new tool that experts expect to be a powerful aid in speeding up disaster responses and making them more efficient is the new Central and Northern California Ocean Observing System, a high-frequency radar system designed to monitor coastal currents.

Such systems have been used in places like the Monterey Bay for research, but never in a coordinated way to provide real time data to people responding to a disaster, said Newell "Toby" Garfield, an assistant professor of oceanography at San Francisco State University. Money to build and operate the system in California came from two state voter-approved water quality ballot measures passed in 2002, he said.

As part of the drill, NOAA officials will also be tracking tidal movements using biodegradable colored drift cards which, if found by members of the public, should be reported to [www.safeseas.noaa.gov](http://www.safeseas.noaa.gov).

Some of the equipment and people who are participating in the exercise were put to the test after Hurricane Katrina, when huge quantities of oil from damaged ships and oil drilling platforms spilled into the Gulf of Mexico.

Carl Childs, a NOAA research scientist from the University of Washington who focuses on spill dispersion, was one of those who went through that trial by fire.

"All we can do is make it less bad," Childs said.

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#### Simulated ship crash: Safe Seas 2006

On Wednesday, nearly 400 federal, state and local officials will simulate a major crash of ocean-going ships off the shore of San Francisco. In the simulation, the tank barge Dottie, being towed by tug Earnest Campbell, will hypothetically crash with bulk-freight cargo ship M/V Blue Harp. Dottie will sink and both ships will spill oil and other pollutants — represented by hundreds of floating drift cards — into the marine sanctuaries. It will be the largest emergency drill to date.

#### Safe Seas drift cards to be released Wednesday

Location / Color / Quantity / Purpose

1 Crissy Field / Green / 500 / Simulate shoreline oiling impacts and marine debris

2 Baker Beach / Green / 300 / As above

3 Fort Funston / Green / 200 / As above

4 Dottie / Yellow / 1000 / Simulate pollutant being continuously released from the fuel barge

5 Blue Harp / Orange / 1000 / Simulate oil sheen from the freight ship due to the collision

Sources: NOAA, ESRI, TeleAtlas, USGS

Gus D'Angelo / The Chronicle

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