

Jim Hardwick

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Guides & Mentors

Jim Hardwick

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Tell us about your job. What inspired you to pursue this career?

I am an environmental specialist for the State of California, Department of Fish and Game. It is my job to plan for and respond to spills of oil and other materials with the potential to injure fish and wildlife. I recommend actions that minimize the injury to the State's natural resources. I also attempt to measure the injury and recommend projects to compensate for the loss. I enjoy working with people with a diversity of training and experience to minimize very real and tangible threats to the State's living natural resources.

My parents taught me to respect the needs of our fellow creatures as well as those of other humans. My work with the Department has permitted me to contribute to the resolution of conflicts between the needs and wishes of my fellow humans and the needs of our fellow creatures.

Describe a day in your life. What is it like to respond to an oil spill?.

My days at work are highly variable. I may be called out at any hour of the day or night to respond to a spill. Like a fireman I must maintain all my equipment in good working order. This includes a respirator and other equipment to provide me with clean air to breathe, protective clothing, two-way radios, and a cellular telephone.

Upon arriving at a spill site I approach the site slowly from upwind and uphill and assess the safety of the situation. When I am certain of my personal safety and the safety of my fellow responders, I begin making recommendations to the incident command for response actions that will minimize the injury to fish and wildlife.

Once the spreading of the contaminant is controlled, I assess the degree of contamination and recommend cleanup procedures. One or more Department of Fish and Game environmental specialists continue to monitor the cleanup until they are satisfied that no more can be done. We then assess the injury and recommend remediation and compensation projects.

Only a few days a month are spent actually responding to spills. Most days are spent in meetings or at a desk. The Department of Fish and Game's environmental specialists work closely with the United States Coast Guard, shipping and industry as well as other natural resource trustees such as the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Park Service, Native American Nations and organizations, local government, colleges and universities, private consultants, and many conservation organizations to write spill response plans and procedures. These plans ensure that differences of opinion have been addressed before an emergency occurs.

These contacts with other organizations also help us identify and document the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the natural and cultural resources at risk. The Department of Fish and Game maintains a geographic information system (GIS) in which we identify the living and cultural resources at risk to spills. We conduct field investigations to verify the accuracy of our information on natural resources, and use computer models to investigate the vulnerability of those resources to spills.

What is the health of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem?

The ecosystem of San Francisco Bay has and continues to suffer from a great many threats to its integrity. We are not likely to eliminate all threats, but we have reduced the magnitude of many threats, and must continue our efforts to anticipate new threats and reduce the impacts of threats both old and new.

What can individuals do to protect the health of the bay?

We must continually seek to inform ourselves of the status of the bay and of the living conditions of our fellow creatures living in and upon the bay. We must identify the current and proposed threats to those creatures and share our knowledge and opinions with our fellow citizens and our representatives in government.

What is OSPR doing to protect and clean-up the bay?

The Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) is doing many things to reduce the amount of contaminants spilled into San Francisco Bay. We inspect and monitor transfers between vessels in the bay. We prevent or stop transfers that are not being conducted safely. We review spill contingency plans prepared by vessels carrying oil cargo, and by facilities transferring oil to or from ships to ensure that these vessels and facilities have adequate spill prevention and response plans in place. We respond to spills to ensure that the plans of government and industry are implemented.

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