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Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana  
Area Contingency Plan  
(SETX and SWLA ACP)

Louisiana Decanting Plan

Annex HH2  
June 2025

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**Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana Area Contingency Plan**

**Record of Changes**

| <b>Change Number</b> | <b>Change Description</b> | <b>Part Number</b> | <b>Change Date</b> | <b>Name</b> |
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# Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana Area Contingency Plan

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## **1000 Introduction**

When oil is spilled on the water, mechanical recovery of the oil is the principle approved method of responding. However, the mechanical recovery process and associated systems necessarily involve placing vessels and machinery in a floating oil environment. Incidental returns of oil into the response area, such as oil that falls back into the recovery area from vessels and machinery that are immersed and working in the oil, are an inevitable part of the mechanical recovery process. Similarly, separation or “decanting” of water from recovered oil and return of excess water into the response area can be vital to the efficient mechanical recovery of spilled oil because it allows maximum use of limited storage capacity, thereby increasing recovery operations.

This practice is currently recognized as a necessary and routine part of response operations. In addition, some activities such as those associated with oil recovery vessels, small boats, and equipment cleaning operations may result in incidental discharges. These activities may be necessary to facilitate response operations on a continuing basis and all of these activities are considered to be “incidental discharges.”

## **2000 Decanting Policy**

Decanting is not preauthorized within Louisiana state waters. Any use of decanting will be considered on an incident specific basis. The State of Louisiana prohibits the discharge of oil and oily water that creates a sheen. Any decanting discharge would need coverage under a Louisiana water discharge permit. However, as specified in [LAC 33:IX.2315.A.4](#) and [40 CFR 122.3\(d\)](#), the Federal On-Scene Coordinator can authorize the discharge as well as the conditions for that discharge. Although the USCG FOSC is authorized to allow decanting within the coastal zone, it’s understood that the USCG FOSC, operating within a Unified Command (UC) construct (in-person or virtually), will consult with the State On-Scene Coordinator (SOSC) if at all possible – before decanting is approved.

Decanting operations, if authorized, normally is a short-term tactic to expedite maximum oil recovery using mechanical recovery equipment (worst case discharges may exceed these resources throughout the region). From the onset of an incident, the RP must aggressively pursue and maintain sufficient oil skimming and storage capacity to alleviate the need for any prolonged decanting operations.

Other activities related to possible oil discharges associated with an oil spill event such as actions to save a vessel or protect human life which may include such actions as pumping bilges on a sinking vessel are not covered by this policy.

This policy is applicable for the entire coastal zone within the State of Louisiana, spanning three Area Contingency Plan planning areas. This policy provides for an expeditious decanting approval process and provides clarity to the Unified Command (UC), response contractors, and other members of the spill response community.

## **2100 Criteria**

During spill response operations, mechanical recovery of oil is often restricted by a number of factors, including the recovery system’s oil/water recovery rate, the type of recovery system

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employed and the amount of tank space available on the recovery unit to hold recovered oil/water mixtures. In addition, the longer oil remains on or in the water, the more it mixes to form an emulsified mousse or highly mixed oil/water liquid, which sometimes contains as much as 70% water and 30% oil, thus consuming significantly more storage space. Decanting is the process of draining off recovered water from portable tanks, internal tanks, collection wells or other storage containers to increase the available storage capacity of recovered oil. When decanting is conducted properly most of the petroleum can be removed from the water.

The overriding goal of mechanical recovery is the expeditious recovery of oil from water. In many cases, the separation of oil and water and discharge of excess water is necessary for skimming operations to be effective in maximizing the amount of oil recovered and in minimizing overall environmental damages. Expeditious review and approval, of such requests is necessary to ensure a rapid and efficient recovery operation. In addition, such incidental discharges associated with mechanical recovery operations should not be considered decanting. In appropriate circumstances, the FOSC can pre-authorize incidental discharges because the discharges will be much less harmful to the environment than allowing the oil to remain in the water and be subject to spreading and weathering.

Therefore, the SETX and SWLA ACP adopts the following policy in order to provide for an expeditious decanting approval process and provide clear guidance to the Unified Command (UC), response contractors, and other members of the spill response community.

### **2200 Oils Pre-Approved for Decanting and Associated Conditions**

Approval for on-water decanting can be authorized by the USCG Federal On-Scene Coordinator (FOSC) when pumping recovered oil and water ashore is not practical during a pollution incident. Although not preauthorized, the following oil products are considered appropriate for decanting on an incident specific basis. Lighter oil products not listed below will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- All crude oils
- Vacuum gas oil
- Atmospheric gas oils
- Recycle oils not containing distillates
- Bunker fuels
- No. 6 fuel oils
- Cutter stocks
- Coker gas oils

Decanting of the listed oils may be approved if the following conditions are met:

- The RP must fill out the Louisiana on-water decanting request form (see Section 3000) and seek Unified Command approval prior to conducting decanting operations; and
- The Unified Command must be notified within one hour of decanting being initiated.

The following criteria found in the current Oil Spill On-water Decanting Authorization Form must be complied with:

- All decanting shall be done in a designated “Response Area” within a collection area, vessel collection well, recovery belt, weir area, or directly in front of a recovery system;

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- Vessels employing sweep booms with recovery pumps in the apex of the boom shall decant forward of the recovery system;
- Vessels not equipped with an oil/water separator should allow retention time for oil held in internal or portable tanks before decanting commences;
- Containment boom, lined with sorbent boom, shall be deployed around the collection area, as appropriate, to prevent loss of decanted oil or entrainment;
- Visual monitoring, including an effective communication system, of the decanting operation shall be maintained at all times so that discharge of oil in the decanted water is detected and that discharge is terminated promptly; and
- Unified Command can revoke the approval at any time if the above conditions are not met.

### 3000 Oil Spill Decanting Authorization Form

**Table 1 Oil Spill Decanting Authorization Form**

|  |
|--|
| The federal and state OSCs, hereby approve the use of decanting as a means of expediting the recovery of oil during the following spill cleanup operations |
| Date(s) Approval Effective:  |
| Name of Spill Incident:  |
| Federally Defined Response Area:   |
| Name of Requester:   |

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Location and description of proposed decanting operation: (continue on additional pages if necessary):

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The decanting operation must meet the following conditions:

1. All decanting should be done in a designated “Response Area” within a collection area, vessel collection well, recovery belt, weir area, or directly in front of a recovery system.
  
2. Vessels employing sweep booms with recovery pumps in the apex of the boom shall decant forward of the recovery pumps.
  
3. Vessels not equipped with an oil/water separator should allow retention time for oil held in internal or portable tanks before decanting commences.
  
4. Containment boom must / need not (circle one) be deployed around the collection area to prevent loss of decanted oil or entrainment.
  
5. Visual monitoring of the decanting shall be maintained at all times so that discharge of oil in the decanted water is detected promptly.
  
6. Decanting in areas where vacuum trucks, portable tanks, or other collection systems are used for shore cleanup will be subject to the same rules as a vessel on the condition that the container is clean.
  
7. Additional Comments:

SIGNATURE:

Date:

Federal OSC

SIGNATURE:

Date:

State OSC

**Note:** When verbal authorization is given, a copy of this form must be immediately expedited to the requester (must be a person of authority in the response organization) to ensure that the conditions and limitations are clearly understood by all parties.

## 4000 Decanting Use Decision Memo

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Name of Spill Incident:  | Name of Requestor: |
| Federally defined response area:   | Product Spilled:   |
| Effective date(s) of approval:   |                    |
| Current storage capacity on site:  |                    |
| <p>The Federal and State OSC's hereby approve the use of decanting as a means of expediting the recovery of oil during the above mentioned spill response operation. The following approval provides authority to conduct decanting of oil so that response operations do not cease or become impaired. FOSC authorization is required in all cases, and SOSC authorization is required for decanting within state waters. The OSC should acknowledge that recovery operations enhanced by decanting will actually reduce the overall quantity of pollutants in a more timely and effective manner to facilitate clean-up operations.</p>  |                    |
| <p>The following criteria should be followed in order for decanting to proceed in an efficient manner:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) All decanting should be done in a designated "response area" within a collection area, vessel collection well, recovery belt, weir area, or directly in front of a recovery system.</li> <li>2) Vessels employing sweep booms with recovery pumps in the apex of the boom should decant forward of the recovery pump.</li> <li>3) All vessels, motor vehicles, and other equipment not equipped with an oil/water separator would allow retention time for oil held in internal or portable tanks before decanting commences.</li> <li>4) A containment boom must / need not (circle one) be deployed around the collection area to minimize loss of the decanted oil or entrainment.</li> <li>5) Visual monitoring of the decanting area shall be maintained so that discharges of oil in the decanted water are detected promptly.</li> <li>6) Tanks used for decanting will be tested prior to use to ensure there are no contaminants from previous activities and that the water is safe to discharge back into the environment.</li> <li>7) Settling times for oil water separation on board skimmers is estimated to be:</li> <li>8) Additional conditions:</li> </ol> |                    |
| <p>Approval: (Check one) <span style="margin-left: 150px;">Yes _____</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;">No _____</span></p>  |                    |
| Environmental Unit Leader (Planning) _____   |                    |
| FOSC _____   |                    |
| SOSC _____   |                    |
| Reason for disapproval: _____  |                    |

**Figure 1 Sample Decanting Use Decision Memo**