

# TAKING TIME OUT WITH OSRL

RRT spoke with Paul Foley, Regional Response Manager (Europe & Africa) for Oil Spill Response Limited about his company's partnership with ExxonMobil.



Paul Foley, OSRL

## Tell us about OSRL's partnership with ExxonMobil?

"I was really heartened when you used the word partnership rather than contract because this is what we really strive for," says Paul. "OSRL has around 157 members, and many of these, especially our founding members such as ExxonMobil, regard us as a partner, rather than just a contractor. With ExxonMobil, we consider ourselves as a partnership in 'response AND preparedness' so when a spill happens, we are mobilised to work together in a seamless way."

## What does your work with ExxonMobil entail?

"Our mission is to effectively prepare and respond to spills on a global basis. That's what we do, but importantly, it is also about unlocking the potential of people. And that's not just within our own team – but the people within ExxonMobil – so that we can all make a difference in safeguarding the environment."

"The majority of the work that we do to support ExxonMobil is in relation to its readiness to respond. If and when an oil spill happens, we want to be as ready as possible. My job is making sure that we are ready to respond when we need to."

## How has the pandemic impacted on your work?

"We've worked closely with ExxonMobil's RRT during the pandemic and our primary focus has been making sure that we can respond in a safe way. As with ExxonMobil, safety is one of OSRL's core values."

"We've been modifying our techniques to affect a response on the ground whilst keeping people safe. So, we have been testing what would happen if we needed to mobilise people into a specific country. Field guides for PPE processes and behaviours have been developed with specific guidance and procedures – all of which are unpinned by method statements and risk assessments."

"Being ready and able to respond quickly when the world is effectively locked down with closed borders and limited transport has been quite a challenge."

## Have you undertaken any RRT exercises with ExxonMobil during the pandemic?

"With ExxonMobil, we applied some of the processes and internal lessons that we learned to a scenario-based oil spill drill called 'exercise oyster' last summer."

"The exercise was focused on a location offshore Nigeria, and we worked with teams based in Leatherhead, UK as well as business units in Nigeria and Angola. 75 people dialled into the remote, virtual IMT (incident management team) exercise to test our adapted processes and see how much could be achieved remotely and how we could safely put boots on the ground."

## How did the exercise go?

"Despite the pandemic backdrop, it turned out to be a good scenario-based exercise, but it's only useful if you have some lessons learned. We now have a better understanding of how the virtual platforms work."

"We also know that although we can mount an effective response remotely with many of the roles and functions being performed outside of the incident location, we still see the benefit of getting people and boots on the ground. Having a 'pathfinder' to make sure that it's safe for others to follow is important too."

"Testing a blended approach of virtual and physical response which could work in any situation where you can't get into a country – for example, because of infrastructure, political unrest – proved invaluable."

## But what about the human factor – unlocking the people potential in a pandemic?

"That was one of the interesting elements of this blended exercise. How could we properly address and overcome the fears of the team operating in a pandemic situation? We had to consider questions such as – what happens if I get ill – what are the local hospital facilities like and what about my family?"

"We did some work internally too, asking our OSRL colleagues if they were comfortable responding? That was an interesting development, which we fed into the exercise. The volunteer members of the RRT were also asked the question – are you willing to go?"

"So, in summary, it was a good exercise. Its findings were also fed into some other work that we're doing with industry as a whole through IPIECA, the Industry Petroleum Environmental Conservation Association."

## Do you see the new approaches being continued post pandemic – rather than reverting back to the way things were before?

"I think so. It would be a waste if we don't take some of the good learnings forward. Even outside of the pandemic, there are still benefits with adopting a hybrid approach."

"We've certainly used technology in a more progressive way than we would have without COVID-19. I'd like to see us continue to harness the benefits of virtual collaboration and bring that forward through into the new normal. IPIECA is now championing a hybrid approach of virtual response alongside the physical response too."

"For example, it can help us exert positive influence early, on decisions being made in a country where you don't have a physical footprint and is a 12-hour flight away."

"There are also the environmental benefits of reducing our carbon footprint. Historically, we've thought nothing of jumping on a 12-hour flight for a one-day meeting. That has now changed and rightly so."

"The thought-leadership and academic thinking is interesting in relation to climate change and carbon not least because we've got a lot of environmentally conscious personnel within our teams. The sustainability of our business and adherence to the sustainability goals is something that OSRL is focused on because we need to be."

*Continued overleaf...*

“We’ve got skill-sets that we’ve built over the last 30 years to mitigate the impact of oil spills. This is still an important area, but the ability for us to translate those and pivot towards other environmental contaminants or pollutants like plastics is also very relevant.

“We’ve recently been in Sri Lanka helping to mitigate the effects of plastic nurdles washing up on the beach, rather than oil. I think there’s transferability of lots of our techniques. Our members want us to use our skills more widely as we can add even more value. It’s a win-win!”

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXERCISE OYSTER WORKSHOP 2020

1. We can respond during the COVID-19 pandemic

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2. Working virtually requires more planning

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3. Liaison officers improve integration with OSRL

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4. Still aim to co-locate a liaison officer

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5. Function to function communication is essential

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6. Have a dedicated OSRL facilitator role

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7. Pick the right people for the team including ‘Pathfinders’

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8. The same ICS / IMS principles apply

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9. Virtual IMT guidelines required

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10. OneNote to get started as an alternative interim solution worked well

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11. Plan for IT issues to happen and choose the right IT platform

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12. Working remotely is tiring

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13. Plan time for command and exercise facilitators to meet

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14. It’s all about relationships - regularly exercising together and keeping relationships alive outside of exercise and spills is important