

Douglas Helton



Professional Summary

Douglas Helton recently retired from the Emergency Response Division in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Over 33 years of experience in preparedness, response and restoration for oil and chemical spills and other ocean pollution issues. Worked on over 700 incidents throughout the US and internationally. Represented NOAA and the U.S. Government at the International Maritime Organization, Arctic Council, Alaska Regional Response Team, and the Oil Spill Recovery Institute.

Experience

Regional Operations Supervisor; 2015-2025

NOAA Emergency Response Division, Seattle, WA

- Supervised NOAA's national spill response team: 13 NOAA Scientific Support coordinators assigned to USCG Districts and Sectors covering the entire U.S.
- Responsible for national coordination of oil and chemical spill incidents, including coordination with field teams, NOAA headquarters, and U.S. Coast Guard.
- Represented NOAA at national and international forums such as the US National Response Team and Alaska Regional Response Team and Arctic Council.
- Federal Chair of the Oil Spill Recovery Institute in Cordova, Alaska.
- Responsible for outreach, media, and Congressional/Intergovernmental communications. Conducted hundreds of media interviews and briefings.
- Responded annually to 150-200 marine oil spills, hurricanes, and other incidents.
- Conducted dozens of specialized response and technical trainings for USCG Federal On-Scene Coordinators, USCG strike team members and other responders.

Operations Coordinator; 2004-2025

NOAA Emergency Response Division, Seattle, WA

- Coordinated NOAA responses to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and hundreds of other incidents. Responded on-scene to dozens of incidents.
- Worked with other NOAA programs and NOAA leadership to ensure that each response was adequately staffed, that leadership was kept abreast of emergency issues and that NOAA fulfilled its roles under the National Contingency Plan and other authorities as both a response organization and a natural resource trustee.
- Managed oil and chemical pollution and marine debris responses resulting from the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami and the 2009 tsunami in American Samoa.
- Led NOAA's program to assess 20,000 historic shipwrecks. Developed national list of 87 priority wrecks in U.S. waters that still pose oil pollution threats.

- Completed NOAA's leadership program, a competitive 18-month program of training and developmental assignments. Served as director of NOAA's Marine Debris Program and conducted supply-chain carbon footprint analysis for the Port of Seattle.

Legislative Fellow; 2007

Senate Commerce Committee, Washington, DC

- Requested by Senator Inouye to serve as staff to the Senate Commerce Committee.
- Served as a science fellow to the Subcommittee on Oceans, Coast Guard and Fisheries.
- Provided technical support for the development of legislation, including drafting of bills and reports, review and analysis of amendments and other legislative documents, making recommendations on policies, and preparation of decision memoranda.
- Direct involvement with legislation to address marine invasive species, coral reef protection, oil pollution, ocean mapping and ocean exploration, and ocean conservation issues.

Spill Coordinator; 1992-2005

NOAA Damage Assessment Center, Silver Spring, MD

- Developed and maintained a 24/7 response program that allowed NOAA to rapidly initiate damage assessment studies following oil spills.
- Responded on-scene to conduct field studies to document environmental impacts.
- Negotiated with responsible party experts to develop cooperative assessments.
- Worked closely with the Department of Justice and NOAA attorneys and other agencies to negotiate and settle cases and recover millions in funding for restoration.
- Developed natural resource restoration plans for dozens of spill and waste sites, including satisfying federal and state regulatory requirements.

Marine Policy Fellow; 1991-1992

John Knauss Marine Fellowship Program, NOAA Sea Grant, Washington D.C.

- Successfully competed for one of twenty marine policy fellowships awarded annually by the National Sea Grant College Program. Worked with the NOAA General Counsel on new regulatory strategies for the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.
- Worked for NOAA on a variety of natural resource assessment projects including serving as an expert witness on a spill case in Delaware.

Project Leader; 1988-1991

University of Washington Fisheries Research Institute, Seattle, WA

- Supervised and was responsible for scientific and logistical operations for two multi-year fisheries research projects. Managed and supported remote research stations in the Bristol Bay and Alaskan Peninsula regions of western Alaska.
- Served as shipboard scientist on a Bering Sea research project studying migratory patterns and timing of salmon runs to improve harvest forecasts.

- Analyzed and synthesized fisheries, oceanographic, and weather data, prepared reports and seasonal and in-season salmon forecasts.

Publications

Published over 50 peer-reviewed papers on topics including oil pollution, emergency response, environmental restoration, oil dispersants and other response technologies, marine debris, abandoned vessels, coral reef restoration, historic shipwrecks, marine salvage, and the environmental, social, and economic impacts of spills.

Education

[Master's in Fisheries and Aquatic Science](#)

University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 1991

[Bachelor of Science, Biology](#)

Reed College, Portland, OR, 1985