

TEENS PIPED ABOARD



Photos by GINA VERGEL

■ Top, Coast Guard personnel participate in Thursday's cleanup drill. Above, the cutter Katherine Walker, where members of Middlesex County College's Science and Technology Preview summer camp observed the exercise. Below, Rich D'Allasandro of Marine Spill Response Corporation, Edison, explains the drill.



Summer camp uses Coast Guard

By **GINA VERGEL**
STAFF WRITER

BAYONNE — Edison High School student Brianna Habyk spent much of a hot and hazy Thursday on the high seas, watching the Coast Guard clean up an "oil spill" on the Hudson River.

"I would probably hate to do the job, but it was pretty cool," Habyk said of the Coast Guard exercise, which involved no spilled oil, only the actual equipment and maneuvers that would be used in

such an emergency.

Habyk, joined by 16 other teenagers from Edison, Linden and Elizabeth enrolled in Middlesex County College's Science and Technology Preview summer camp, were on board the Coast Guard Cutter Katherine Walker to observe a Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System exercise.

Also on hand were representatives from the Marine Spill Response Corporation, an Edison-based firm that brought its own

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ON THE WEB

VIDEO: See a video from the mock cleanup at www.thnt.com.

DRILL

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vessel, the New Jersey Responder, to assist with the pollution-response drill.

"It's what we do best," said Rich D'Allassandro, supervisor for the company's Eastern Region site in Perth Amboy. "When we're not responding to an actual emergency, we're training, maintaining our equipment and basically, making sure we're ready to go — 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

The 210-foot New Jersey Responder has been involved in several high-profile emergencies.

Its crews helped clean up the mess on the Arthur Kill in Perth Amboy last year and a similar spill on Rhode Island's North Cape in 1996. During the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, she provided lighting for helicopters and bathrooms for first

responders working at Ground Zero.

The Marine Spill Response Corporation was created by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which was enacted in response to the Exxon-Valdez spill.

The company is funded by its clients, such as BP Oil, Chevron and Conoco-Phillips, which hire the firm to stand by in case of any mishaps.

And how is the oil cleaned up?

"We lower a boom skirt that contains the oil - puts it all together, then the oil gets put into the center and using a skimmer, we suck it up into one of four 1,000 barrel storage tanks," D'Allassandro said.

The 175-foot Katherine Walker, too, skims oil in the much of the same manner, though it must use, VOSS, a modular oil-recovery system that can be secured to, and operated from, a vessel at a spill site.

VOSS is one of 19 systems pre-staged at the Coast Guard's

Atlantic Strike Team based at Fort Dix.

According to information provided by the Coast Guard, VOSS can be immediately deployed anywhere across the country. With this system, a vessel can quickly transform into an oil-recovery platform with a maximum skimming capability of 190 gallons per minute.

While the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration require industry to plan, equip, and train for oil-spill responses, the Coast Guard maintains equipment to augment industry capability to quickly mitigate any environmental impact, officials said.

Lt. Amy Florentino, the Katherine Walker's commanding officer, said Thursday's exercise, the first she has directed in her one year at the helm of the cutter, went just as planned.

"We did a few maneuvers with the ship as if there was a

real emergency, and it was a good chance for the crew to get their hands dirty, so to speak," Florentino said. "Plus, there was good weather and not a lot of traffic, so that helped."

About 25 Coast Guard crewmembers assisted with the exercise.

The Coast Guard Cutter Katherine Walker is named after the famous keeper of Robbins Reef lighthouse, located near the entrance to the Kill Van Kull between Staten Island, N.Y. and Bayonne, officials said.

The ship's primary mission is maintaining over 300 aids to navigation in and around New York Harbor, Long Island Sound, the Hudson and East rivers, and other waterways along the Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey coastlines.

The Katherine Walker also performs environmental response and protection, port security, search and rescue and ice-breaking operations.

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