



# Exercise nets invaluable experience

**GAIL JANSEN**

The Pipeline

More than 100 members of the Western Canadian Spill Services (WCSS) cooperative took part in an oil spill exercise on Lake Newell in September as part of an annual training exercise that helps members learn what to do in the event of a spill.

A non-profit cooperative made up of shareholders that include the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), Small Explorers and Producers

Association of Canada (SEAPAC), Canadian Petroleum Products Institute (CPPI), Enform, Enbridge Pipelines Inc. and Kinder Morgan Canada Inc., the WCSS mandate is to provide training and support to all of it's Alberta and Saskatchewan members as a way to reduce the potential environmental effects a spill may have.

Made up of six separate zones in Alberta and Saskatchewan each, Alberta is further broken down into separate areas within the zone, with each area responsible for conducting and training their own representatives.

One such training exercise that recently took place in Area S, a wide expansive area that includes the districts and municipalities of Brooks, Medicine Hat, and Taber, looked to educate it's members on what to do in the event of a lake spill.

"Water-type spills are not exactly a common occurrence in Alberta," admits Area S Chair Lorne Schmidt. "But that is exactly why our training is all the more important. Not too many people have had experience with that type of spill, so we need to have the knowledge of what to do should one occur."

"Our industry has come a long way in the last 20 years with technology and equipment, that better prevents spills from occurring," continues Schmidt. "But the bad part of that is that we forget how to deal with them. Just one of the reasons why it's so important for us to have this cooperative and these exercises."

Another reason says Schmidt is to ensure that smaller companies with limited personnel have the resources they need to react. "There are a lot of companies in the industry that don't

have a hundred employees. As a co-op we help them get set-up in the event of a spill, until they get the resources they need there."

"We don't clean it up for them," says Schmidt. "We just give them the information and the knowledge they need to contain the spill in the fastest way possible."

In terms of the exercise at Lake Newell, Schmidt says that knowledge took the form of two distinct exercises. One that looked at what to do in the case of a spill that was

contained in a bay, how to surround it and herd it to shore for pick up, and the other to simulate what to do in the event of a spill during a period when there is a lot of wind on the lake.

"Instead of surrounding it in that instance," says Schmidt. "We

taught a more directional approach where you angle the boom in such a way that the wind directs the oil to the shoreline for pickup."

Schmidt who has been a part of the



**Aquaguard Skimmer** is used at the annual Western Canadian Spill Services exercise held this year at Lake Newell.



WCSS for the past 20 years, says that he personally has learned a ton over the years he has been involved.

"Spills to me are like a fire," says Schmidt. "They have a life of their own, and you have to try and outsmart them and try to anticipate what they will do next." Which sometimes says Schmidt leads to doing the opposite of what one might expect.

Having experienced a lot of spills

over his career, including a few in the Brooks area, though none as of yet on water, Schmidt says for him it's all about saving the environment.

"It's why we do what we do, when we take the time to engage in these types of exercises."

For more information on becoming a member of the Western Canadian Spill Services cooperatives visit their website at [www.wcss.ab.ca](http://www.wcss.ab.ca)



Crews gather around the Inflatable Boom Trailer during the training exercise.

Submitted photos