

The Coastal Waters Consortium Presents:

Scientist Spotlight



Ann Hayward Walker

What is your educational background?

MBA in Management, Golden Gate University; BFA Architecture and Environmental Planning, University of Hawaii; Undergraduate liberal arts studies at the American College in Paris and Univerista per Stranieri, Perugia, Italy.

What inspired you to become a scientist?

As evident in my educational background, I'm not a scientist by training. Since childhood, I've lived near and been drawn to the ocean, as well as to the scientists who understand how "things work", especially in the marine environment. Over the last 30+ years my career has involved collaborating with a range of scientists to address policy and decision maker questions at the University of Hawaii, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), School of Marine Science, College of William and Mary, and scientists at other research institutions and agencies.

Can you describe what you enjoy the most about conducting scientific research?

Good research generates knowledge, which in turn provides a credible and defensible basis for making decisions about the set of actions that, when implemented, could improve the outcomes from oil spills, i.e., mitigate the impacts from spilled oil and secondary impacts from response actions. Key considerations include: Will the oil or a response action do more harm than good, in the longer term, post-spill view? Which impacts are significant and to be avoided, and which impacts can the organism, habitat, population can bounce back and recover from in a reasonable time frame? Oil spill decision makers recognize that tradeoffs are usually necessary and they turn to science to inform the choices they have to make very quickly with a great deal of uncertainty and information gaps.

What is your role as a scientist for CWC?

My role in CWC II is to provide outreach from the CWC scientists back to the oil spill community to enable CWC findings to become incorporated into preparedness and response decisions. I'd like to explore possibilities to engage CWC scientists for real-time decision support during future spill responses, as mutually appropriate and agreed.

Can you summarize your oil spill research and describe any surprising findings you have come across?

My role during response has been coordinating scientific inputs to support response decision making. This has involved communicating science in lay terms, as well as risks and impacts to decision makers and communities affected by an oil spill. To this end, I've been the PI for two multi-disciplinary oil spill and dispersant risk communication research projects. One surprise has been that the social scientists accurately predicted surprising disconnects between science experts and lay persons, including decision makers, about spilled oil and dispersants.

The Coastal Waters Consortium's mission is to assess the chemical evolution, biological degradation, and environmental stresses of petroleum and dispersant within Gulf of Mexico coastal and shelf ecosystems.

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