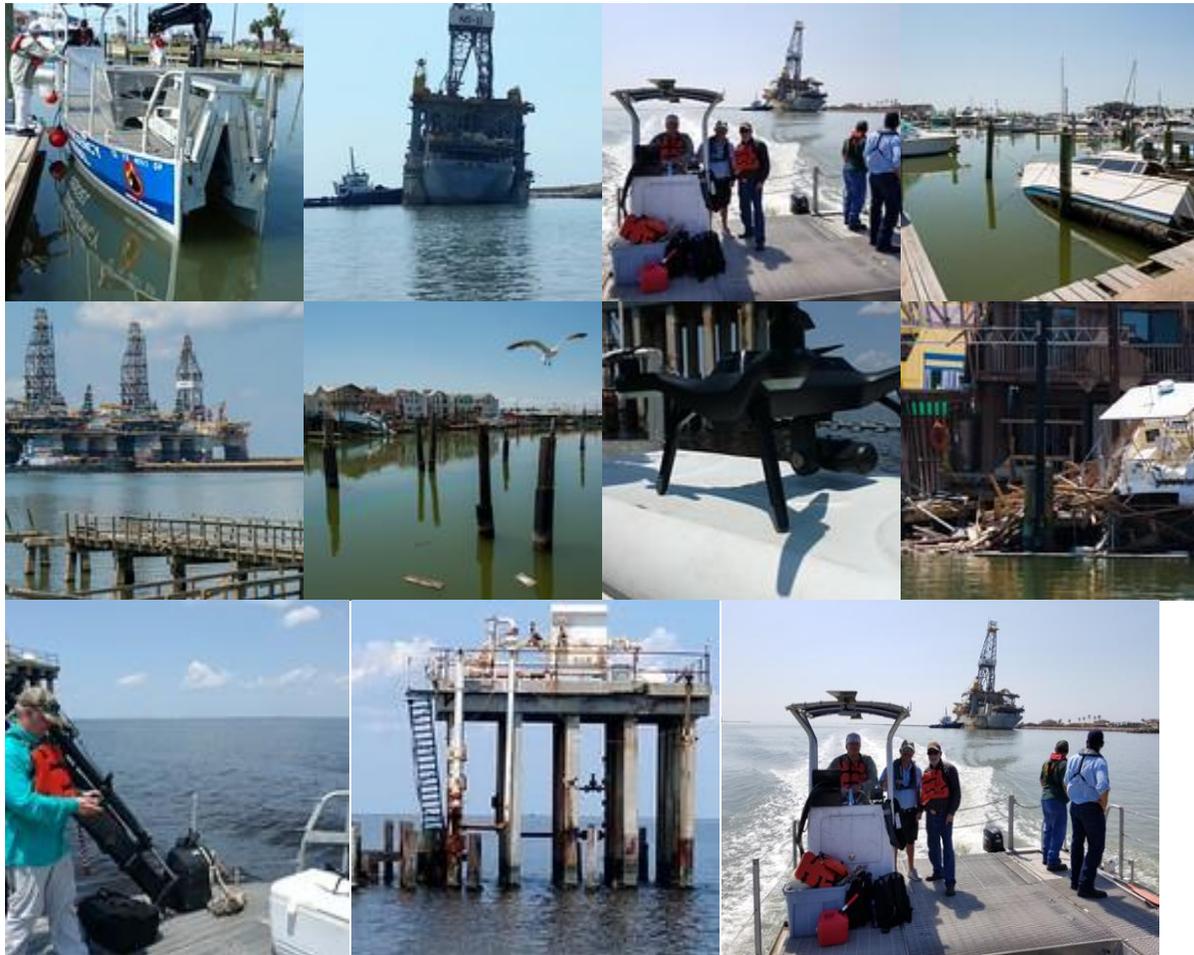


# Post-Harvey A&M-Corpus Christi National Spill Control School Searches for Oil

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PORT ARANSAS, Texas – A team of students and staff from the National Spill Control School (NSCS) and the Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence & Innovation (LSUASC) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi supported the Texas General Land Office (TGLO) during disaster recovery efforts following Hurricane Harvey.

Tony Wood, Director of the NSCS and Jerry Hendrix, Executive Director of LSUASC, deployed Island University personnel a few short hours after receiving the support request from TGLO. The team was sent to Port Aransas, which received the brunt of Harvey's destructive force and is still without power a week after the storm. Their job

was to assess marine and structural damages in the Port Aransas Harbor and Aransas Bay by surveying oil production structures, sunken vessels and floating debris left behind after Harvey.

“The destruction that occurred in Port Aransas is just gut-wrenching,” said Wood. “To see all of the boats – the life-blood of the community – stacked up on each other really makes us want to help. We want to get out there into the communities and do what we can to provide our support.”

All of this would not have been possible without the new 27-foot-long 14-foot-wide Multi-purpose Emergency Response Vessel, or MERV, which was loaned to the University from a two-time alumnus. Wayne Fellers, CEO of MERV Marine USA Inc., and Bob Putt, International Vice President of MERV Marine USA Inc. agreed to loan the vessel to the University because they believed “putting MERV into an academic surrounding was the best way to have the vessel's true capabilities realized and exercised.”

Fellers graduated with his bachelor's in occupational training and development in 1994 and his master's in occupational training and development in 1996. He worked with Chris Gunter, marine architect, to help make his idea of a vessel that is “dedicated to life, safety, humanitarian and environmental response” a reality.

“I am part of the first class that graduated from the University after it was renamed Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and I am very proud of that,” he shared. “The MERV is the only one of its kind and I know the University will put it to work.”

MERV allowed the team access to waters less than 1.5-feet deep and gave LSUASC a place to land their drones. Staff from LSUASC flew drones over Aransas Bay and Copano Bay to collect high definition video of oil structures as well as gather geo-located photos of sunken tanks and vessels. While no oil leaks were spotted in the areas, other than a slight oil sheen on the water in the Port Aransas Harbor, NSCS is happy to report that marina operations had already put oil booms in place to prevent leaks. In total, the group was able to locate more than 70 damaged boats.

“It's a merging of surface and air capabilities! MERV gave us the ability to operate easily and effectively over water,” said Hendrix. “We were able to gather great videos and photos while broadening our research and disaster response efforts.”

The National Spill Control School was established in 1977 and provides consulting, training and research resources to the National Response Team. For more information on the National Spill Control School, their personnel and vessels, visit <http://nscs.tamucc.edu/>.

### **TAMUCC team hard at work cleaning Copano Bay canals**

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, the communities in Rockport still have a long road of cleanup ahead. This weekend, the Island University lent a hand to locals in need.

Recovery efforts in the city have been underway since the hurricane made landfall in August, alongside efforts in neighboring Aransas Pass and Port Aransas; but one Rockport community is still struggling to clear its waterways.

"The General Land Office can go out into the Copano Bay area and they have removed debris, but when it comes to the canals, those are private property," said Paula Rowe, a Rockport resident.

Rowe and her family live in the Copano bay subdivision along the waterway and own Coastal Views vacation rentals. Since Harvey, they've seen large debris like metal roofs and trailers in the area's canals; the type of debris that you just can't remove with your bare hands.

That's where Tony Wood and his crew come in. Wood is the director of the National Spill Control School at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (the Island University), who's leading efforts to help the area.

"So we're able to actually pick up a lot of things out of the canals. A couple of weeks ago we actually picked up propane tanks, a couple of riding lawn mowers. Haven't been able to get a car but we did grab a large boat trailer that was in the middle of the canal," Wood explained.

Wood and a group of students use the MERV, or Multipurpose Emergency Response Vessel, to navigate those canals and pull out heavy objects with an onboard crane. The MERV is a 14-foot wide vessel loaned to the university for recovery efforts.

Rowe and others are optimistic about their city's future thanks to the efforts of people like Wood.

"We have all of our homes booked for Thanksgiving, so we do expect to be fully up and running by then. I really think in the next couple of months we're going to be back in business everywhere," Rowe added.

