A note on custom-made oil sorbents using hair.

We have received many questions on the use of hair to recover oil at the water surface. Cedre has recommended the use of custom-made sorbents to respond to previous oil spills. These sorbents are made from locally available materials and are designed to trap or even absorb the oil. Such systems are generally composed of plant fibres, for instance straw, and are packed into a permeable casing such as chicken wire, netting, mesh... Hair falls into this category and, like many makeshift materials, is not very hydrophobic and tends to absorb water. Once it has soaked up water and oil, it tends to sink and ends up on the seabed, creating a foreign amalgam in the natural environment that is liable to smother flora and fauna, and in particular the coral present in the marine waters of Mauritius. Furthermore, this water-loaded hair tends to increase the cost of subsequent treatment of the oiled waste generated by the spill.

However, on difficult access sites or in regions where little operational equipment is available, the use of such materials is one of the good initiatives that can be implemented pending the arrival of more efficient equipment and products.

Our Operational Guides:

- "Use of Sorbents for Spill Response", published 2009.

- "Custom-Made Spill Response Barriers", published 2012.