

Oil Pollution Act of 1990

Overview

The federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) addresses oil spill prevention, response, and liability and compensation should spills occur. OPA 90 is one of two guiding documents under which Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council operates.

Creation of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 was fueled by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of March 24, 1989, in which 11 million gallons of Alaskan crude oil leaked into Prince William Sound waters when the tanker grounded. It soon became apparent that response resources, especially federal funds, were lacking, and that required compensation to those affected was not enough under federal law. One of the most important results of the oil spill was the enactment of OPA 90, which addressed both of these deficiencies.

OPA 90 amended the Clean Water Act and addressed the wide range of problems associated with preventing, responding to, and paying for oil pollution incidents in navigable waters of the United States.



Workers used high-pressure, hot-water washing to clean an oiled shoreline in Prince William Sound after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. (NOAA photo)

The act significantly increased federal oversight of maritime oil transportation, while providing greater environmental safeguards.

OPA 90 also required Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. to establish and fund a citizens' advisory group. Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) is certified as the program for Prince William Sound. Cook Inlet Regional Citizens' Advisory Council was established for Alaska's Cook Inlet region. Many people involved in the establishment of the Prince William Sound council also actively promoted citizen involvement provisions in OPA 90.

These oversight groups are designed to promote partnership and cooperation among local citizens, industry, and government, and to provide citizen oversight of environmental compliance by oil terminals and tankers.



TOP: Oil remaining on the Exxon Valdez is transferred to another vessel. (NOAA photo)

CENTER and BOTTOM: Commercial fishermen removed buckets of oil by hand from Knight Island in Prince William Sound during the Exxon Valdez oil spill clean-up effort. (Photos by Tom Copeland)

see also:

www.pwsrcac.org/about/index.html
www.pwsrcac.org/docs/d0000200.pdf