



CENTER NEWS

The Alaska Center for the Environment

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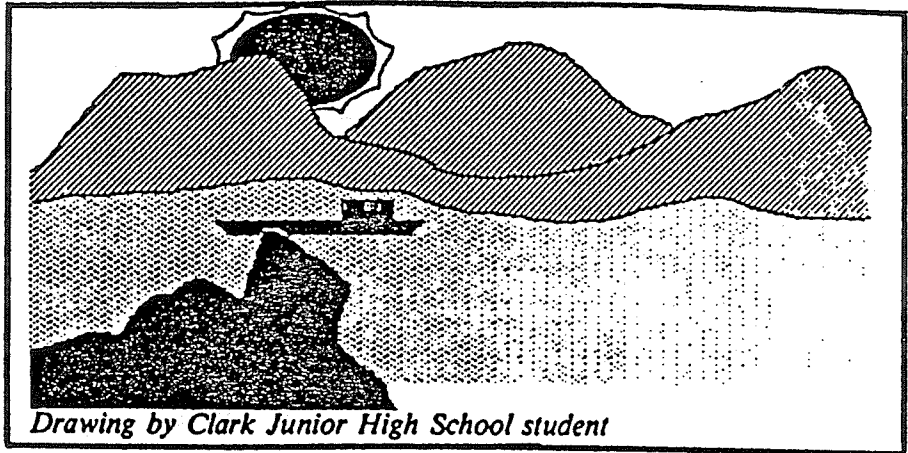
A.C.E.'s response to Exxon spill

by Sue Libenson

The tragic tanker accident that resulted in the Valdez Exxon oil spill is already nearly two months in our past, yet the frenzy of spill-related activity in the A.C.E. office has not yet abated and the spill continues to spread. To bring our members up to date, I'd like to briefly outline the various responsibilities that the Center has assumed. In addition to institutional responsibility, however, the spill has now given each of us new responsibilities as the world watches to see what type of cleanup we require, what policy changes we demand, and what changes we make in our personal lives.

Volunteer Response Hotline: Within hours of the spill the Center's phone lines were jammed with calls from concerned individuals from around the world seeking information or offering to help. In order to respond to these calls the Center, in conjunction with Greenpeace and the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club, installed a hotline number and office. The number is 276-3688 and the office is located at 241 E. 5th Avenue on the same floor as the Sierra Club office.

Over 1,500 calls have been received to date. Information about callers, including special skills, materials, vessels, or knowledge of the Sound, is recorded in a data base. The State was so impressed with our operations and with a companion office that we helped to



Drawing by Clark Junior High School student

establish in Valdez that they have contracted with us to maintain the hotline service.

The next step will be to define a larger role for volunteers. Several state agencies as well as the President have expressed an interest in doing so. Volunteers have already been used in animal cleanup operations. Volunteer efforts to identify oiled beaches and retrieve oiled wildlife are planned or already taking place in Cordova and Homer. While most would agree that all of these functions should be paid for by Exxon, the company is simply not responding in a timely manner and volunteers have taken these initiatives out of necessity.

Prince William Sound Cleanup and Rehabilitation Fund: Recognizing that responding to an environmental

catastrophe of this magnitude was far beyond the normal resources of local conservationists, the Center took the lead in establishing a special, tax deductible fund. The Fund's main goals are to provide means for volunteers to get involved in the cleanup, assist educational projects relating to the spill, and assure public oversight for government and Exxon policy decisions concerning the cleanup.

Donations to the fund should be sent in care of the Alaska Conservation Foundation, 430 W. 7th Ave., Suite 215, Anchorage, AK 99501, (907) 276-1917. The Fund board will meet once a week to consider written proposals.

Political Response: Before the truth gets lost in the waves of backpeddling

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Anchorage Creek Cleanup MAY 20th



A.C.E.'s response to Exxon spill

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politicians we should remember that as one of the worst ecological disasters imaginable lapped at our shores, the initial response of many of our elected officials in Washington and Juneau was a shameless collusion with the oil industry to downplay the problem.

Starting with the top, the Center took the lead in writing to President Bush, along with thirteen other local conservation groups, demanding improved regulation of the oil industry and a halt to leasing in sensitive areas, including Bristol Bay. The President did not respond, but the Governor subsequently requested our assistance in developing proposals for improved regulation.

With the spill over one week old, Representative Young had not deemed it worth his while to visit the scene, Senator Stevens was laying low, and Senator Murkowski had made some disparaging comments about the spill being the price we pay for receiving a permanent fund check. To demand a better response, the Center organized a rally in front of the Federal Building on March 27. Several hundred people attended to listen to speakers and demonstrate their outrage.

While our delegation was stalling and fumbling for a response palatable to the oil industry, Congressman George Miller of California, chair of the House Interior Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Offshore Energy Resources and an important voice on Alaskan issues, visited the spill and recognized it for what it truly represented: a failure of the controls meant to prevent spills and a breakdown of the entire regulatory system charged with overseeing the oil industry. I was fortunate enough to attend a meeting with the Congressman and local fishermen where I was able to pass on some of our concerns and recommendations. Representative Miller plans extensive hearings in Washington and held hearings in Valdez, May 7 and 8. Don Young is a member of this subcommittee.

Future Policy Concerns: For the first time in recent memory, many politicians will be looking to the conservation community for the appropriate response to the spill. The Center has taken the lead in working with national conservation groups to develop an environmentalist agenda relating to the oil industry. This includes reforms related directly to the spill, such as needed changes in tanker safety laws, as well as broader concerns such as the need for a national energy policy. A similar state agenda was developed before the end of this legislative session.

Remembrance: The spill, of course, has significance far beyond the economic or political realms. The loss of Prince William Sound has had profound spiritual effects as well. The Center helped to coordinate Prince William Sound Day, a local day of remembrance held April 23rd and a national day of remembrance was held May 7th.

Media: Keeping up with Exxon's public relations machine has been a monumental task. As one observer so well put it, the only thing that Exxon has been good at containing is the truth. Daily, the calls have come in from around the world. I have done interviews with everyone from the Los Angeles Times to London television stations to the Clark Junior High newspaper.

Although the overall coverage has recognized the spill for the disaster it is and exposed Exxon's inadequate response,

Exxon has still be successful in obscuring many details of this scandal and there remain many questions which the press has failed to tackle. For example, what are the likely long term impacts of the spill and why was only one animal cleanup center established for the first several weeks? More importantly, why, when we discover that industry has in essence been lying to the public over the years, do reporters continue to take so many industry comments at face value without referring to other sources, such as the Center, for balance?

The reporting of the spill has already far outlasted the normal attention span of the American media. The challenge now will be to maintain interest so that the full story is covered and Americans can fully reflect on the implications of this type of disaster.

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This spill will shape our lives for years to come. Our responsibilities are daunting. Although all Alaskans are spill victims, we as local conservationists have the greatest responsibility to respond with creative, effective means for restoration of the Sound and its long-term protection, political remedies which realistically address the risks posed by the oil and gas industry, and renewed efforts to decrease our dependency on these fuels.

NOTE: ACE activities in response to the spill continue to change and grow daily. Please contact the office for a current update.



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