

# Valdez folks feel 'cheated'

By CHARLES WOHLFORTH  
Daily News reporter  
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**VALDEZ** — Valdez is holding its breath, expecting to change because of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, but still wondering how much.

The town will still be kept by oil, but like a betrayed lover, is unlikely to maintain blind trust anymore.

"Valdez has always been one of the most pro-development communities in Alaska," said Valdez City Councilman Lynn Chrystal. "We probably still will be. But we feel very let down, and very cheated. It's almost like you found out your wife is cheating on you."

The marriage of Valdez to oil, although betrayed, will survive. Valdez lives on oil. Except for the fishermen. They're not



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Anchor (Daily News) Eric Ho Charter boat operator Stan Stephens of Valdez

## VALDEZ: Town that's lived well with the oil industry now feels betrayed

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talking about marriage, they're talking about rape. Fishermen say the spill was a violation and a loss of innocence.

But those in Valdez who win their livelihood from the sea are working on the water with oil containment booms. Although they occasionally have made angry statements at press conferences, their outcry has been relatively muted compared to the Cordova fishermen, who sent a delegation to Valdez early in the spill to hold a press conference of their own.

Stan Stephens, who owns a pair of large tour boats, has been working on the Sound since 1961. This week, he is working for Exxon, carrying cleanup workers to the beaches. He surrenders to the irony.

"It has to be done," he said. "We're sacrificing our to get this done. I'd r lose my business than

have this happen."

Stephens is tall and tough and his round head seems creviced by the sea. His voice was a vulnerable growl and his eyes were wet.

"We're close to tears most of the time," he said. "You spend your whole life in a place, then you see that they destroy it."

But Stephens, like others in Valdez, has had trouble finding a focus for his anger. The pipeline has been here a dozen years, and since then, everyone in town has made friends with people who work for the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

The relationship has been one of dependence for Valdez. Alyeska's taxes pay 90 percent of the \$33 million annual city budget — four to five times what other towns the same size have to spend. Valdez funds its own community college.

"I don't know if I'd say we're socialistic, but people look at us that way," said City Manager Doug Griffin.

"When people need any kind of help, they look to us."

He wears a plaid flannel shirt to the office, but the office looks like it belongs to a man in a three-piece suit. Other towns would drool if they saw Valdez's city facilities.

Valdez is unlikely ever to reject its sugar daddy, Alyeska, which gave the town its nice things. The company is known as "Uncle Al" around city hall.

"Probably we're going to be seeing people become more environmentally concerned now. But we're still dependent on them. They've given us a stable, strong economy," Griffin said.

For that minority of people in town who lived here before the pipeline was built and don't owe oil a thing, the dependence of Valdez on oil and the cozy relationship it led to can be frustrating.

Doris Lopez, 22, married into a two-generation Valdez fishing family. She recites her convictions about Al

ka's environmental threats, and the lack of interest in the subject among her neighbors up to now.

"They've been apathetic forever," she said. "We've been shouting and screaming and practically exploding bombs under people to get them involved."

In the past, Valdez has at times been concerned, but never enough to do very much. Lt. Gov. Steve McAlpine, the town's former mayor, said in the early '80s, when Alyeska stopped having a full-time cleanup staff, the town offered to stockpile cleanup materials but gave up the idea when Alyeska said it was unnecessary.

When the spill hit, Alyeska did not have enough equipment to deal with it, and freight was still arriving in town from the Lower 48 days later.

The interest of the community in the danger of oil was reawakened earlier this year when the tanker Thompson Pass cracked and

spilled oil which was recovered at the dock in Valdez harbor.

The mayor appointed a committee to find out what more should be done to be prepared for spills. Stephens was chairman of the group, which held its first meeting Thursday night.

Stephens said the group decided Alyeska's equipment was not sufficient and the town needed its own response team. Two hours after that decision was made, the Exxon Valdez was on the rocks.

The town was shocked, but for land dwellers in Valdez, the spill is already fading.

"At first it's shock and disbelief, then you're angry, then you're sad, and then you start to accept it," said Chrystal, director of the local weather station.

For fishermen, it's harder. "I said, 'Well, we might be able to sit back and let Exxon support us for the rest of our lives,'" Lopez

said she told her husband, Tom. "He said, 'No, I want to fish.' He loves to fish. He loves to go out."

Salmon fisherman Jim Brown tried to make reporters understand just what it was he was afraid of losing.

"There are few things in this world I enjoy more than sitting on my boat and seeing my nets smoke with fish, and crack crab and eat it after pulling it out of my pots, and seeing mama bear with cubs ambling down the beach, and looking at the glaciers around me. There are places in Prince William Sound where you can see 14 glaciers at one time. We had a pristine environment. It's like a loss of innocence."

Lopez is able to think of the future.

"I think when it's all said and done, if this doesn't destroy everything, this is going to be a fishing town," she said. "The oil is going to run out some day, and the sooner the better."