

TAB 5

Conclusion

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The Prince William Sound dual escort vessel system for oil-laden tankers is a proven prevention measure that protects the environment, lives, livelihoods, and the economy of Alaska and the nation that depends upon uninterrupted production of oil from Alaska's North Slope. The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill demonstrated the tragic consequences of a tanker accident. No matter how "safe" new oil tankers are supposed to be, there is always the potential for the people operating those tankers to make mistakes or have serious lapses in judgment, for some technological equipment malfunction to take place, or for some aberrant weather event to wreak havoc.

The two high-powered tugs that escort each laden oil tanker can assist a tanker if it experiences a loss of steering or propulsion, and can normally stop a drifting tanker before it runs aground. The tugs serve as lookouts and help alert the tankers to any dangerous conditions. They provide additional sets of eyes and ears and additional experience to help a tanker avoid a serious accident. They also are immediately available to provide initial oil spill response capabilities in the event that an accident does occur.

There is remarkable unanimity in support of maintaining the current dual escort system: the Alaska Legislature, the governor, the Alaska congressional delegation, the people, communities and businesses in the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill region, the state's two largest daily newspapers, and many others.

To responsibly address the problem outlined in this briefing booklet, Senators Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich introduced S. 1041. This bill would memorialize in federal law a practice that is already in place for double-hull tankers and in use today – a system that provides proven protection against the potential for future catastrophic oil spills in Prince William Sound. Congressman Don Young worked successfully with Chairman Oberstar in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to include language requiring the maintenance of the dual escort system in the Coast Guard Authorization Bill of 2010 (H.R. 3619). The Coast Guard Bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in October 2009. But, legislative action is still required in the U.S. Senate to ensure that the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 is amended to continue this proven, essential safety practice.

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC), authorized under OPA 90, has carried out its monitoring and oversight responsibilities through cooperation and consultation with industry and federal and state government agencies. This collaborative effort has resulted in one of the safest marine oil transportation systems anywhere in the world. Passage of the remedial legislation, S. 1041, is one of the most important actions Congress could take to help ensure there is never another oil spill with such devastating consequences as the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska.