

# Exxon Valdez Oil Spill 15th Anniversary Edition

Chenega Bay - Cordova - Homer - Kenai Peninsula Borough - Kodiak - Kodiak Island Borough - Kodiak Village Mayors - Seldovia - Seward - Tatitlek - Valdez - Whittier



# The Observer

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AK Chamber of Commerce - AK Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Assoc. - Chugach Alaska Corp. - Cordova District Fishermen United - OSREC - PWS Aquaculture Corp.

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## Fifteen years after *Exxon Valdez*, much has changed

The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of 1989 gave rise to a host of new measures intended to prevent any more such catastrophes and to improve the oil industry's ability to respond if prevention should fail.

In the intervening decade and a half, much has changed. Many tankers loading at Alyeska's Valdez terminal now boast double hulls, which can reduce or eliminate spills from groundings and collisions. The vessels are escorted out of the Sound by powerful tugs designed to keep a disabled tanker off the rocks or begin the cleanup effort if there is a spill.

Detailed contingency plans for preventing and cleaning up oil spills are now mandatory, and citizens' councils watch over industry operations in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet.

In this article, the *Observer* summarizes these and other safety improvements to the oil trade through Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska. The accompanying article examines areas where work is still needed to be sure future Alaskans don't have to re-learn the painful lessons of 1989.

### Double hulls

Alaska citizens called for double hulls for oil tankers long before the first barrel of oil flowed down the trans-Alaska pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez in 1977.

A double-hull tanker, as the name suggests, has two steel hulls rather than one, with a void space several feet wide between the two hulls. This void space, a kind of buffer zone, means a penetration of the outer hull during a grounding or collision is less likely to reach and breach the oil tanks, causing a spill.

The calls for double hulls on Valdez-bound tankers were ignored until the *Exxon Valdez* struck Bligh Reef. A Coast Guard study later estimated a double hull could have reduced the 11-million-gallon spill by as much as 60 percent. A little over a year after the spill, Congress passed the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. One provision required a gradual phase-out of single-hull tankers from U.S. waters by 2015.

The first double-hull tanker built for Valdez service under the Oil Pollution Act was the *Polar Endeavour*, now operated by ConocoPhillips. It carried its first load of North Slope crude out of the Sound in July 2001, marking a great day for Alaska and its environment. In fact, the ConocoPhillips tankers go beyond federal requirements. They are equipped with double propulsion and steering systems, as well as double hulls.

Today, eight of the 22 tankers in the Valdez fleet boast



**HOMELAND SECURITY** came to Valdez in a big way in late December, when a security scare resulted in the Alyeska oil terminal shutting down for two days, and, as shown here, fighter jets patrolling overhead. The alert ended without incident after nine days and Valdez returned to normal. Photo by Pat Lynn, *Valdez Star*.

## DEC's Ballard: more focus on field work, less on permitting

The Murkowski administration is committed to environmental protection, but will change how that's done, according to the state's chief environmental watchdog.

The plan is to shift the state's emphasis "away from the administrative permit review and approval process to performance through field verification," according to Ernesta Ballard, head of the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Ballard's remarks came in an address to the citizens' council board

See page 2, **Ballard**

## Despite progress, more effort on safety still needed in some areas

Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska today are much safer from oil spills than they were 15 years ago, but that doesn't mean every problem has been solved and every risk eliminated. This article looks at areas where the oil-transportation system is not yet as safe as it could be.

### The response gap

Although 15 years have passed since the *Exxon Valdez* spill, there is still a major loophole in the regulations governing the rescue and response tugs that escort loaded oil tankers out of Prince William Sound.

As a result, Alyeska's tugs would not be required to

See page 6, **Changes**

See page 7, **Needed**

**OLD HARBOR** – Linda Robinson, the council's community liaison, visited Old Harbor early this year to be a judge in the Kodiak Island Rural Science Fair, not to mention pointing her camera at some remarkably cute kids. From left, Anastasia Shugak, Lateasha Naumoff, and Kailey Shugak. See Linda's column, back page.



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**Volunteer Profile**

**TOEM member came north searching for adventure, found plenty in Alaska**

Denise Saigh was born in Teaneck, New Jersey, half an hour from the cultural and urban wonders of New York City.

Which was exactly the problem. She wasn't cut out for life in a metroplex.

"I never liked it much," is how she puts it.

What Denise Saigh wanted was something in short supply in New Jersey: Wilderness. Open space. The chance to hike, surf, scuba dive, or climb mountains, or, preferably, all of the above.

That desire led her to Florida for college, a bachelor's degree in biology, and lots of diving, camping and spelunking.

In the early 1980s, it led her to Alaska. She was living in San Diego at the time. There was plenty of scuba diving and surfing, but she was bored.

"I knew absolutely nobody," she said. "I moved up here with my dog. I wanted to mountain-climb, explore, fly."

And that's exactly what she's done. She took a whack at Denali in 1991 and made it to 18,000 feet before her lungs gave out. She got a commercial pilot's license, and volunteered for searches with the Civil Air Patrol. Besides Anchorage, she's worked in Kodiak, Sitka and Ketchikan. And in 1993 she received her master's degree in environmental science from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Today, she's active in skijoring, mushing, and avalanche and mountain rescue, as well as the council's Terminal



Denise Saigh on Mt. McKinley in 1991.

Photo courtesy Denise Saigh

**Below:** Denise with Katmai and Baleen



**Above:** Garments made from the Samoyeds' warm, thick underfur.

Photos by Stan Jones, citizens' council

Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee, or TOEM. She makes her living teaching chemistry and biology at Alaska Pacific University and the University of Alaska Anchorage. She's also a stained-glass artist, which she teaches in Anchorage's community schools program.

She got interested in the citizens' council through a chance connection that started when she was doing water-quality

work for the Municipality of Anchorage. She hired a college student named John Williams who eventually graduated, moved to Cordova and became a member of the council's Scientific Advisory Committee. The two stayed in touch, and Williams told her about the council and its work. In addition, she occasionally saw the *Observer* and her interest grew.

In March 2003, she joined TOEM. Its job is to monitor the environmental

impacts of Alyeska's Valdez oil terminal and the tankers that use it, and to advise the council of its findings.

Since joining, Saigh said, she's done a lot of listening and learning, and has been impressed by how much knowledge the council has amassed on the consequences of moving North Slope crude through Prince William Sound. "It's great that you have all this information out there for people," she said.

Besides adventure, one of Saigh's chief passions in life is the Samoyed dog, a Russian breed originally used in reindeer herding. She owns two of them: Katmai, age 9, and Baleen, age 5.

The Samoyed is the perfect northern dog, she says. "They can carry backpacks, they can mush, they can skijor, and they can handle cold weather – you can leave them in the car all day."

So great is Saigh's fondness for Katmai and Baleen that they are always with her, in a sense. She combs the undercoat out of their long white fur during the July shedding season, then has it made into hats, scarves and vests.

Saigh was a teenager when she saw her first Samoyed and was immediately smitten. When her own dog died several years later, she got her first Samoyed within a week, a female named Santana. Santana's gone now, but Katmai and Baleen have replaced her.

"They furry, they're fluffy, and they're beautiful," Saigh said. "And they have a great disposition."

**BALLARD: Focus on field work**

Continued from Page 1

during its quarterly meeting in Anchorage in December.

The centerpiece of the administration's strategy, Ballard said, is legislation that Gov. Frank Murkowski pushed through the Legislature last year to extend the contingency plan renewal cycle from three years to five. That will free the agency up to conduct more drills and inspections, she said.

Ballard said the agency's goal for the 2004 fiscal year -- which ends June 30 -- is to conduct 45 percent more drills than in the previous year. As examples, she cited announced oil-spill drills conducted in Valdez in June and September, 2003.

The agency also plans to conduct more than twice as many inspections in the current fiscal year as it did in the previous year, she said.

"Our heightened field presence will not only validate proper operation and maintenance of both prevention and response equipment, but also help ensure compliance," Ballard said. "We subscribe to the simple theory of law enforcement: if you know the trooper is lurking along the highway, you will probably obey the law."

Also, Ballard said, the state will be verifying financial responsibility to

make sure that filers of contingency plans can actually carry them out. And the agency will overhaul its regulations in an effort to make standards more clear.

Executive director John Devens said the council is encouraged by the state's increased emphasis on drill and exercises, but does not want to see any relaxation of permitting standards.

"Permitting is how we make sure the industry will follow the regulations," Devens said.

Noting that then-U.S. Senator Frank Murkowski backed the concept of citizens' councils as the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 was being created, Ballard credited the Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet councils for increasing public awareness of oil industry operations and garnering public support for strong environmental protection.

"We will not be caught off guard again," Ballard said. "The consequence of failure is unacceptable."

Her pledge of environmental protection echoed recent remarks by Murkowski himself. In November, the governor spoke to the annual meeting of Alaska Chadux Corp., an oil-spill response cooperative.

"The result we seek is a pollution-free environment," Murkowski said. "That's the objective."



Ernesta Ballard

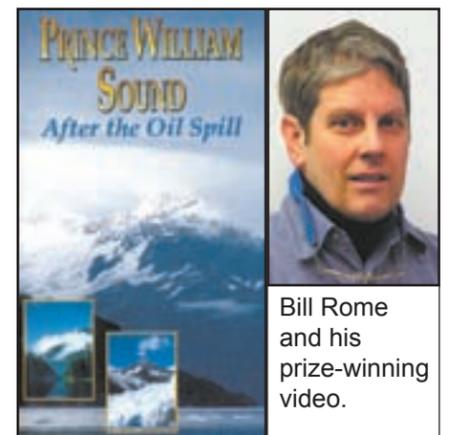
**Local filmmaker wins award for video of Sound**

A film about Prince William Sound and the citizens' council won an honorable mention in the Anchorage International Film Festival this winter.

The 28-minute video -- titled "Prince William Sound -- After the Spill" -- was produced by Eagle River videographer Bill Rome.

Rome is a retired Air Force dentist who devotes much of his time to recording Prince William Sound from his boat, the *Roamer*. In sailing season, he bases himself out of a condo in Whittier.

The next stop for his Prince William Sound video is this spring's Hawaii Oceans Film Festival.



Bill Rome and his prize-winning video.

For more information on "Prince William Sound -- After the Spill," contact the citizens' council office in Anchorage.

**Copeland says sayonara**



**SO LONG** -- Long-time council board member Tom Copeland announced his resignation at the December quarterly meeting. He has represented the Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition on the board since 1998, and has served on the Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee since 1990. His seat was to be filled at the March board meeting. Above left: Copeland waves goodbye for the camera. Above right: Copeland collects crude oil in plastic buckets near Knight Island during the *Exxon Valdez* cleanup. Left photo by Stan Jones, citizens' council. Right photo courtesy of Tom Copeland.

## On anniversary of Exxon Valdez, Alaska practices are international model

By John S. Devens, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

I frequently use this space to point out perceived shortcomings of the oil industry, but this time I want to recognize how much better the industry performs in Alaska than in many other parts of the world.

During the first week of February I flew to Scotland for a two-day meeting with people from Shetland, Angola, and Nigeria. The purpose of this meeting was to form an organization to help African countries see examples of the best practices of the oil industry and learn from them.

This new 'North/South Platform' grew out of the United Nations' 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Funding for the effort comes from a grant provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the project is being coordinated by the United Nations Stakeholder Forum. One of the con-

ditions placed on funding the program was that there should be a representative from Alaska.

Thus far two areas of best practice have been identified, Alaska and the Sullom Voe oil terminal in Scotland. The element that Alaska and Sullom Voe have in common is the active involvement that citizens of the area take in the safe handling and transportation of oil. While citizens in these areas are not hostile to the oil industry, they are demanding that best practices be followed.

In many parts of the world oil development is taking place without the involvement of local citizens and often the governments of these areas lack the knowledge or the motivation to demand best practices. It is the goal

of the North/South Platform, through exchange programs and academic research, to provide examples and training

in what should be expected and the good that can be achieved if the revenues from development are used in a constructive manner.

In the next few months there will be an effort to identify other developing areas in Africa and other parts of the world experiencing oil development and to also identify

other oil provinces where best practices are exhibited. Sometime in the fall we expect to have another meeting in Scotland and, later, a meeting in Alaska.

Alaska has much to show other areas of the world. In the twelve months

of 2003 not a single drop of oil was spilled from tankers to water in the state. The tanker companies coming to Alaska have designed and are building double hull tankers that not only meet but exceed federal requirements. The tugs we use in Prince William Sound are some of the finest in the world. Our best available technology laws are examples of how seriously we take prevention of and response to oil spills.

This international interest in Alaska practices comes on the 15th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill and is another reminder of the importance of the safety improvements in crude oil transportation triggered by the devastating spill.

Most of those improvements are the result of partnership between industry, regulators and citizens, which is perhaps the most valuable lesson we can teach people in other countries facing the prospect of major oil develop-



John Devens

## Tanker exercises demonstrate power, problems, of Alyeska's escort/response tugs

### ■ Winter drills test performance of the vessels in near-closure conditions at Hinchinbrook Entrance

The oil industry this winter finally conducted towing exercises that address a question long pushed by the citizens' council: Can Alyeska's escort tugs save a stricken tanker in the severe weather common at Hinchinbrook Entrance?

The results so far are mixed. On the success side of the ledger, an Alyeska Enhanced Tractor Tug – the *Nanuq* – “saved” a loaded tanker in winds over 40 m.p.h. and waves of 12-13 feet.

For the Feb. 6 exercise, the *Overseas Washington* was cruising at 10 knots – about 12 m.p.h. – when it suddenly cut power and started a sharp left turn, then called for assistance. The “save” consisted of the tug approaching the tanker, connecting a towline, arresting the turn and restoring the vessel to its original heading.

Hinchinbrook Entrance – where ships pass from the Sound into the Gulf of Alaska – is closed to loaded tankers when winds exceed 45 knots – about 52 m.p.h. – or wave height exceeds 15 feet. Thus, the *Nanuq* test occurred in weather near closure conditions, a long-sought council goal.

However, another exercise the same day was less successful, even though conducted in less windy conditions. It involved the Prevention/Response Tug *Aware*, which has a different design from the *Nanuq*. Wind was approximately 12 m.p.h., with seas still at 12-13 feet.

The *Overseas Washington* cut power and started a turn, this time to the right. The *Aware* approached the *Overseas Washington* and successfully hooked up, arrested the turn, and restored the tanker to its original heading.

However, problems developed as the *Aware* reeled in the 500 feet of towline run out for the exercise. The winch failed, suffering a cracked casing that caused a small spill of hydraulic fluid on deck. Alyeska maintains the damage would not have prevented *Aware*

from continuing the assist, as the winch structure and brake remained intact.

Earlier this winter, the *Aware* had problems during another towing exercise, this one in 15-20 m.p.h. winds and 6-10 foot seas. In that incident, the towline broke during the effort to stop the tanker.

As a result of these incidents, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation determined that the *Aware* and its two sister Prevention/Response Tugs would not be allowed to serve as primary tanker escorts until questions about their performance were resolved. That meant at least one of the two tugs escorting each loaded tanker was required to be an Enhanced Tractor Tug – either the *Nanuq* or its sister vessel, the *Tan'erliq*.

Council board member Stan Stephens, who was aboard *Aware* to observe the Feb. 6 exercise, came away convinced the Alyeska tugs can perform at or near closure conditions. But the incidents demonstrate the importance of continuing two-tug escorts, he said.

“Whenever you're making a save on a tanker in closure conditions, any tug might fail,” Stephens said.

The success of the Feb. 6 exercises convinced Stephens that further rescue drills in severe weather aren't warranted. The risks, he said, outweigh the advantages. Future drills, he believes, should be conducted in seas of four to five feet at most.

The council, however, has not taken a position on the question. It will be up for discussion at the March board meeting, when a report on the recent exercises will be presented.

As the Observer went to press, Alyeska said it had addressed the problems with the Prevention/Response Tugs and hoped to be able to announce a lifting of the escort restrictions at the March meeting.

### Prince William Sound Rescue Tugs



Alyeska operates two main types of escort tugs in Prince William Sound: Prevention/Response Tugs (top photo) and Enhanced Tractor Tugs (bottom). If a tanker loses rudder control, the tugs are designed to attach a towline, even in bad weather, then stop the drift and restore the vessel to its proper heading. The tugs turn sideways and stop a tanker by acting as a kind of sea brake. In recent rescue exercises, both kinds of tugs were able to stop a loaded tanker in relatively severe weather, but the Prevention/Response Tug suffered a broken towline in one exercise, and a winch failure in another.

## Have we improved our ability to prevent and clean up oil spills since 1989?

By Ed Morgan, Manager

Ship Escort/Response Vessel System  
That question is almost always among the first questions asked by those who come to Prince William Sound, whether Alaskans or visitors from Outside. Often industry's answer has been to point toward equipment to show how much has changed since 1989. Many Observer readers are familiar with facts and statistics about spill response and prevention equipment.

Today there is a state-of-the-art vessel escort system with five modern escort vessels of over 10,000 horsepower, designed and demonstrated to be capable of saving a disabled tanker. There were only 13 oil skimming systems in Alyeska's response inventory in 1989. Today there are over 60, with recovery capability of over 300,000 barrels in 72 hours. There were only 5 miles of containment boom in 1989; today there are over 35 miles of boom available. In 1989, there was only one barge available to store a mere 12,000 barrels of recovered oil. Today there are 7 barges capable of holding 818,000 barrels. Today three new double hull tankers carry oil through Prince William Sound waters. By the end of this year, two more new double hull tankers will

be added to the fleet, with a total of nine entering service by the end of 2006. Before the end of the decade all of the tankers in the fleet will be double hull or double bottom.

New tankers and escort tugs, the increases in the inventory of response equipment, and the improvements to prevention and response procedures are only part of the story, however. The agents of change since 1989 have been people, whose effort, vigilance and commitment have transformed the tragic memories and hard lessons of 1989 into a record of steady improvement in protection and preparedness. People have made the difference. They have included duty officers and maintenance teams at our Ship Escort/Response Vessel System (SERVS); watch standers at the Coast Guard Vessel Traffic System/ watch standers, officers and crews of the tankers; fishing vessel crews from Valdez to Kodiak; and agency and citizens council plan reviewers and drill observers, just

to name a few. Sometimes their efforts are highly visible. In large drills over a hundred people may crowd into the SERVS emergency operations center, and over fifty vessels may practice response tactics on the water. As many as a hundred additional responders may deploy equipment along the shoreline. But prevention of spills depends on people doing the unseen to the best of their ability, from the marine pilots, watch officers and helmsmen on the tankers during a nighttime passage, to crew members and response

specialists on the escort tugs, response barges and support vessels. Prevention depends upon the careful work of berth operators and marine team technicians, and on the response crews who tend the boom around the tankers at berth in the cold of a winter evening. The performance of the system is only as good as the next tanker transit, the next deballast and loading operation, and the next escort.

Without the commitment of people in the multitude of jobs connected with the safe and efficient movement of our nation's oil through the waters of Prince William Sound, this complex system could not achieve what it has. Here is one measure of that achievement: in the year just concluded, over 332 million barrels of oil were loaded at the Valdez Marine Terminal and carried by tankers through Prince William Sound. During that same year not a drop of crude oil entered the waters of Port Valdez or Prince William Sound as a result of those operations. That is an achievement that comes not because of tugs, barges, containment boom or contingency plans, important though each may be. It is an achievement that comes from people.

As I write this, a tanker is making the approach turn to tie up at Berth 4, with three tugs preparing to assist its docking. Our record of achievement will depend on the safe loading of this tanker, and, once laden, its escort out through Hinchinbrook Entrance. We are proud of what we have accomplished in fifteen years. Our commitment comes from the recognition that we are only as good as what we accomplish today.

### Alyeska Viewpoint



Ed Morgan

## Council documents available to the public

Single copies of most documents produced or received by the citizens' council are available free to the public. To make a request, contact either council office. Addresses appear on the back page of the Observer.

### Reports

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- Analytical Report: Prince William Sound RCAC Long-Term Environmental Monitoring Project. 4/28/2003. Geochemical and Environmental Research Group. 951.431.030428.LTEMPcc741&a, 951.431.030428.LTEMPcc472&a.pdf
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- PWSRCAC Long Term Environmental Monitoring Program (LTEMP) 2000-2002 LTEMP Monitoring report. 4/15/2003. Kinetic Lab. 951.431.030415.AnnualLT2002.pdf
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- Review of Vessel Response/Contingency Plan of Major Crude Oil Transporters in PWS for Conformance to 33 CFR 155 Subparts D and E C-Plan, Shippers. 6/27/2003. Erich Gundlach, E-Tech International. 753.431.020627.EtechCPlan.pdf
- Report on 2003 PWSRCAC-EVOS Long Term Environmental Monitoring Program. 10/1/2003. James Payne William Driskell, Jeffrey Short. 951.431.031001.EVOSannuProR.pdf
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### Letters

- Comment letter on the January 27, 2004 public notice by DNR requesting comments on the recent changes to the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP). 2/13/2004. Masi Okasaki, US Dept of Commerce/NOAA. 600.105.040213.ACMPRev.doc
- Comments on the Preliminary Effluent Guidelines Program Plan for 2004/2005. EPA Docket: OW-2003-0074. 2/13/2004. Water Docket, EPA. 500.105.040213.EPAeffGuide.doc
- AQC Permit Number 082TVP01 - Title V Air Quality Permit to Operate the Valdez Marine Terminal, (VMT). 2/3/2004. Commissioner Ernesta Ballard, ADEC. 557.105.040203.DECTi5Apeal.doc
- AQC Permit Number 082CP05 - Air Quality Permit to Operate the Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) and Alyeska Pipeline Service Company (APSC) notice for request for adjudicatory hearing on this permit. 1/29/2004. Commissioner Ernesta Ballard, ADEC. 557.105.030129.ADECpsdAPSC.doc
- Letter thanking ATC for their continued cooperation with PWSRCAC. 1/29/2004. Anil Mathur, Alaska Tanker Company (ATC). 800.105.040129.ATCwork.doc
- PWSRCAC Recertification Application. 1/19/2004. Commander, 17th District, USCG. 140.105.040119.USCGRecertLtr.doc
- Towing exercises in less than calm conditions in general. Also references the tether line parting in December 2003 and the lack of notification to RCAC. 1/16/2004. Tom Colby, PWS RPC c/o ATC. 752.105.040116.RPGDrlCndtn.doc
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Continued on next page

## Tabletop exercise in Valdez reveals a crewing gap in the fishing vessel program

A drill early this month turned up a problem with the program that relies on fishing vessels to help out with booming, skimming and other chores during oil-spill cleanups.

The problem: fishing vessel crews were contracted to work 12 to 16 hours a day, while contingency plans for cleaning up spills assumed they would work around the clock. As a result, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. might have been unable to maintain a full-strength, 24-hours-a-day response effort during the crucial period immediately after a spill.

The gap appears to date back five or six years, from the time Alyeska revised the operating manual laying out fishing crew requirements. The problem was discovered during a three-day "tabletop" drill that ran from March 2-4. In a

tabletop drill, no on-water activities take place. Instead, the participants review procedures and methods indoors, on the tabletop.

After the discovery, Alyeska contacted the regional administrators of the fishing vessel program and identified 20 alternate captains who will now be on call for spill cleanup. This means the fishing vessels can provide round-the-clock response, as required, according to Alyeska.

The state will review Alyeska's actions to make sure its response plans comply with state law, according to Betty Schorr, a manager with the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

"We're glad they found the problem," said John Devens, executive director of the citizens' council. "This shows why we need drills."

**Letters:** Available from council offices in Anchorage and Valdez

Continued from preceding page

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June 4, 2003 and September 30, 2003 Unannounced Drills. 12/11/2003. David Wight, Alyeska. 752.105.031210.APSCdrillLtr.doc

Letter regarding the Guard, and the RPG's consideration of not renewing its contract. In this letter, PWSRCAC strongly opposes taking the Guard out of service, as the tractor tugs have better maneuverability than conventional tugs. 12/11/2003. Tom Colby, ATC/RPG. 700.105.031211.ATCguard.doc

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US EPA's WATER9 Model of the Ballast Water Treatment Facility at the VMT and its findings. 12/9/2003. Elaine Manning, US EPA. 557.105.031209.USSEPAbwH209.doc

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# CHANGES: Many improvements since 1989

Continued from Page 1

double hulls. Although continued vigilance will be required to make sure the 2015 deadline doesn't slip, the adoption of double hulls on oil tankers is a major success story in improving the safety of crude oil transportation.

## Escort system

The founders of the citizens' council had long argued that a comprehensive system of powerful escort tugs was needed to ensure the safety of loaded oil tankers leaving Valdez for ports in the Lower 48. With the creation of the council after the *Exxon Valdez* spill, funding became available for scientific research into the issue. In the mid-1990s, the council took the lead in forming a partnership of citizens, industry and government to analyze tanker risks in Prince William Sound. The resulting technical studies, conducted at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars, concluded that better escort tugs were indeed necessary, leading to the world-class system operating in the Sound today.

The fleet, operated by Alyeska's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, includes five state-of-the-art 10,000 horsepower tugs that have proved their capabilities in actual incidents, as well as in sea trials observed and reviewed by the council.

Each loaded tanker is accompanied by two of the escort/response tugs. One of them must be tethered to the tanker's stern during the passage through Valdez Narrows, the most constricted part of the voyage out of the Sound.

## Contingency plans

Anyone who handles or transports crude oil or refined products as cargo must have a government-approved plan for preventing and responding to spills. These are known as contingency plans and they are now required for the oil tankers and for the Alyeska tanker terminal in Valdez.

Contingency plans don't get as much attention as flashy new hardware like double-hull tankers or the state-of-the-art escort tugs. But contingency plans are just as important, because they specify in detail

what the oil industry must do to prevent spills, and how it must prepare to respond to them.

Before the *Exxon Valdez* spill, individual oil tankers were not required to have their own plans. Alyeska Pipeline was required to have one, but it was not well implemented. Spill-response duties were assigned to personnel with other day-to-day responsibilities and equipment was not adequately maintained. As a

result, the initial response in March 1989 was slow, ineffective and poorly coordinated.

That changed after the spill. State and federal agencies expanded requirements and changed some of the assumptions for the Alyeska plan. And the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and new state laws in Alaska led to the first requirements for contingency plans for individual tankers.

The size of spill assumed in a response plan determines the quantity of resources and equipment that must be available. Alyeska's 1987 contingency plan, approved by the state, said a spill of 8.4 million gallons (three-quarters the size of the *Exxon Valdez* spill) was highly unlikely.

Both state and federal law now require planning for bigger spills, and require more spill response equipment to be immediately available. Plan holders must have enough equipment immediately available to deal with a spill of 12.6 million gallons of oil (slightly larger than the *Exxon Valdez*) within 72 hours.

They must also plan for spills of almost 40 million gallons, but may rely more on equipment to be brought in from outside the Prince William Sound area for these larger spills.

## Ice detection

The role of ice in the *Exxon Valdez* grounding is sometimes forgotten, but it was, in a way, the cause of the spill.

When the vessel left the Alyeska terminal with its load of North Slope crude on the night of the spill, icebergs from Columbia Glacier had been reported earlier in the tanker lanes and the crew made a precautionary diversion around the area. The grounding on Bligh Reef occurred because the crew failed to correct the tanker's course in time.

Icebergs from Columbia Glacier also figured in a 1994 incident that did over a million dollars in damage to a tanker under charter to BP. The bow was caved in when it struck an iceberg that was probably mostly submerged and therefore invisible to the crew. The

tanker was empty and no oil spilled, but it was another reminder of the iceberg peril in the Sound.

The danger was confirmed by the council's tanker risk assessment of the mid-1990s. It identified icebergs as the greatest remaining threat to tankers in the Sound once the escort system was improved.

In response to these findings, the citizens' council led a collaborative effort to install ice-detection radar on

a small island near Bligh Reef, site of the *Valdez* spill. The system links electronically to Alyeska and the Coast Guard so that tanker captains and other mariners can be warned of ice in the shipping lanes. The system was accepted as fully operational in 2003, and resulted in the council winning its second Legacy Award from the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force.

## Vapor controls

Spills and other accidents are not the only pollution risks posed by the crude-oil traffic through Prince William Sound. The industry's routine operations also create a certain level of steady, ongoing pollution, such as hydrocarbon vapors released into the air by the Alyeska terminal, as well as oil residues in the treated ballast water it discharges into Port Valdez.

Though this type of pollution is permitted by regulation, it is nonetheless a continuing concern for the council, which strives constantly to reduce the amount of pollution allowed to occur.

For the first twenty years of the terminal's life, the most serious example of this routine operational pollution involved the way tanker loading was conducted.

Thousands of tons of crude oil vapors are forced out of the holds whenever tankers take on their cargo. These vapors are toxic, containing, among other things, compounds known to cause cancer in humans.

Initially, those vapors were vented to the atmosphere, threatening the health of terminal workers and Valdez citizens. The council opposed this practice and called for a system to capture the vapors, backing up its position with a series of scientific studies.

It was a long, hard battle, but in 1995, the EPA adopted a rule requiring such equipment. It began operating in Valdez three years later and, today, virtually all vapors are captured whenever a tanker loads oil.

## Healing the human environment

Amid the outcry over environmental damage from a big oil spill, the plight of communities in the way of the disaster may be overlooked, despite the wrenching social and economic disruptions they endure.

The need to repair the human environment after man-made disasters went largely unaddressed until the council took it up in the early 1990s. After funding comprehensive scientific studies of the impacts of the *Valdez* spill on the commercial fishing town of Cordova, the council created "Coping with Technological Disasters," a guidebook for communities hit by oil spills and other man-made catastrophes. The council also produced a four-part video to train community members in peer listening, a counseling technique explained and recommended in the guidebook.

The council's efforts in this area resulted in its first Legacy Award in 2000.

## Exxon Valdez at a glance



**Vessel:** *Exxon Valdez*, a single-hull tanker

**Date:** March 24, 1989

**Place:** Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, approximately 27 miles southwest of Valdez

**Oil spilled:** Usually estimated at 11 million gallons

Photo: Anchorage Daily News

## Citizens' councils

The oil industry has justly received much public credit for the extensive safety improvements made in Prince William Sound since 1989.

What's less well known is that citizens of the Sound were calling for improvements like these long before 1989. The public also called for independent, adequately funded citizens' advisory councils to oversee industry operations and to monitor the actions of regulatory agencies like the U.S. Coast Guard and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. This call, like the others, went unheeded until the *Exxon Valdez* spill. Then, sensing the shift in the political landscape, a group of citizens formed the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council as a non-profit corporation in December 1989.

In February 1990, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. signed a contract with the council laying out its oversight powers and guaranteeing its funding.

The contract also guarantees the independence of the council, which is referred to as the "Committee":

"The independence, and public perception of independence, of the Committee is of overriding importance to the Committee in fulfilling its functions and in meeting public needs. This Contract shall be interpreted in such a way as to promote the independence, both actual and perceived, of the Committee from Alyeska."

"Alyeska shall have no right to be a member, to have representatives on the board of directors,

See *Independence*, next page



Each loaded tanker leaving Prince William Sound is accompanied by two escort tugs. As shown here, one tug is tethered to the tanker's stern for the most constricted part of the passage. Photo by Stan Jones, citizens' council.

## NEEDED: Much remains to be done to improve system

Continued from Page 1

attempt a cleanup in bad weather, even though loaded tankers are allowed to sail in it.

This loophole – or response gap – arises from the fact that tankers may sail in winds of up to 52 m.p.h. (45 knots, in nautical terms) and waves as high as 15 feet. However, the industry's oil spill contingency plans specify that cleanup is possible only in winds under 35 m.p.h. and wave heights less than 10 feet.

Weather at Hinchinbrook Entrance – where loaded tankers pass out of Prince William Sound into the Gulf of Alaska – is estimated to be in this response gap about 7 percent of the time, equivalent to 26 days out of 365. In other words, for nearly four weeks a year, no immediate cleanup effort would be possible in the event of a spill.

In addition, the ability of Alyeska's tugs to rescue a disabled tanker in closure conditions may be open to question. The maneuvers have been practiced only a few times in weather approaching closure conditions, and some have resulted in equipment failures (see *Towing Exercises* article, p. 3).

To address this problem, the council has proposed lowering the Hinchinbrook closure conditions so that tankers no longer can sail in the most severe weather, when rescue may be uncertain and cleanup efforts are not required.

So far, however, the response gap remains open and the council regards it as a major unsolved problem with the current escort system in Prince William Sound.

### Oil-spill dispersants

For years the oil-industry and many government regulators have maintained that chemical dispersants could be a powerful tool for dealing with oil spills in Prince William Sound or the Gulf of Alaska, despite the fact that they failed when tested on spilled oil from the *Exxon Valdez*. For years, the council has maintained that research has failed to show conclusively whether dispersants work in cold water or how toxic they are in the marine environment.

Chemical dispersants, when applied to spilled oil, are designed to do as their name suggests: disperse the oil into the water column, rather than leaving it floating on top in a slick. If dispersants were indeed safe and effective, there could be situations in an oil spill where their use would be preferable to allowing a slick to reach an environmentally sensitive area.

But, because of the many unknowns about the efficacy and toxicity of dispersants, the council urges regulatory agencies to take a conservative approach towards their use and supports mechanical recovery as the primary oil spill response strategy.

The council has also been a consistent advocate and frequent sponsor of scientifically defensible research on dispersants.

Significant progress occurred on this front last year, when the council succeeded in encouraging regulators and responders to revisit the use of dispersants in Prince William Sound. The council suggested that the Alaska Regional Response Team, or ARRT, review the guidelines on dispersant application adopted just before the *Exxon Valdez* spill, as they are now 15 years old. (The response team is an advisory board to the Federal and State On-Scene Coordinators who direct oil-spill responses.)

The council's recommendations were accepted and ARRT reconvened its Science and Technology Work Group to develop dispersant research questions and review the current guidelines.

It is the council's hope that this process will produce answers to the many questions about dispersants and finally permit all stakeholders in oil-spill safety – citizens, industry, and regulators – to agree on when and how they should be used.

### Non-indigenous species

Many ports and waterways in American have been invaded by alien marine species that, unchecked by the natural limits of their native ecosystems, proliferate in disastrous ways. One example is the zebra mussel, a European bivalve that has invaded the U.S. Great Lakes in such numbers that it has clogged water supply pipes at hydroelectric and nuclear power plants, public water plants, and industrial facilities.

With oil tankers traveling from

West Coast ports and discharging millions of gallons of ballast water near Valdez every year, the risk that Prince William Sound will also be invaded by non-indigenous species has long been a council concern.

As a result, the council has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on studies of the problem. The studies established that non-indigenous species were arriving alive in the Sound, though none appear to have established permanent colonies yet.

Since then, the council has participated with BP and Alaska Tanker

Company in an experiment testing whether ozone could be used to sterilize ballast water before discharge into the Sound and other tactics have been suggested or tested for combating the problem.

However, to date no solution has been found and adopted. The potential for Prince William Sound to be colonized by harmful non-

indigenous species carried in ballast water remains one of major non-spill risks of the North Slope crude oil trade.

### Vapor controls

Though much progress has been made on reducing air pollution at Alyeska's Valdez terminal, it is also one of the areas where work is still needed. Vapors from tanker loading operations are now captured and no longer a significant health risk.

However, the Alyeska terminal's Ballast Water Treatment Facility continues unregulated releases of an estimated 140 tons to 342 tons of hazardous air pollutants annually, including 60-100 tons of the human carcinogen benzene.

The council has urged that these vapors be captured as well, so far to no avail. In February, the federal Environmental Protection Agency completed a lengthy rulemaking proceeding on air pollution from the terminal and opted not to regulate emissions from the bal-



Ballast-water samples were collected and analyzed during the council's research into non-indigenous species. Photo by Joel Kopp, citizens' council.

## Independence: Crucial to council effectiveness

or to have any degree of control over the formation or operation of the corporation.”

In August 1990, the council acquired federal authority when President George Bush signed the Oil Pollution Act into law.

Citizen oversight had become a reality.

Citizen groups, unlike oil-industry firms, are exempt from the profit motive. And, unlike elected officials and bureaucrats in regulatory agencies,

citizen groups are largely immune to political pressure and lobbying from the oil industry. As a result, groups like the council can maintain a steady focus on preserving and increasing safety as oil-company CEOs come and go, and as politicians win and lose elections.

In the years since the *Valdez* spill, citizens' councils have become an accepted part of the oversight system in Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound. We at the Prince William Sound council regularly receive requests for information and assistance from citizens inter-

ested in setting up similar organizations in other parts of the world. And the council is invited from time to time to send observers to the scene of foreign oil spills.

While much remains to be done to make the Sound and the Gulf of Alaska as safe as possible from oil pollution (see accompanying story), much has already been accomplished, thanks to the efforts and cooperation of citizens, the oil industry, and the government agencies charged with its oversight.

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last water facility. At Observer press time, the council was still considering how to respond, with action possible at the March board meeting.

### Management of change

The only constant in the North Slope crude oil trade is change.

Ten years ago, the trans-Alaska pipeline moved 1.6 million barrels of oil a day. Five years ago, throughput was 1.2 million barrels. Last year, it was just under a million.

Until a few years ago, the big three producers were Arco, BP, and Exxon. Now they're BP, ConocoPhillips, and ExxonMobil.

But the company that faces the biggest and most frequent changes is surely Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. It has reorganized with significant layoffs at least four times since the *Valdez* spill, according to the Anchorage Daily News. At this writing, the company is embarked on another major reorganization, this one called "Strategic Reconfiguration."

One part of the current reorganization involves a dramatic overhaul of how the pipeline operates, including remodeling pipeline pump stations to reduce drastically or eliminate entirely the need for round-the-clock onsite personnel.

Next in line for reconfiguration is Alyeska's Valdez operation, which includes the oil terminal and the fleet of tugs known as the Ship Escort Response/Vessel System.

These reorganizations, which include reshuffling and reducing personnel, are always of great concern to the council. One major question is whether the new configuration will focus sufficiently on preventing and responding to oil spills, and on minimizing routine operational pollution.

Another concern is that the stress of transition may cause the system to crack, that people will start to cut corners and let things slide, as happened in the years before 1989.

Barring a major oil discovery on the North Slope, oil flow through the pipeline will continue to decline and Alyeska will continue to face cost-cutting pressure from its oil-company owners. Someday, liquefied natural gas tankers may sail the shipping lanes of Prince William Sound, complicating operations for the present fleet of oil tankers and escort tugs.

Thus, it seems safe to conclude that Alyeska will always be in transition, either planning its next reorganization, carrying out a reorganization, or adapting itself to the last one.

Consequently, the biggest job of everyone involved with oil-spill safety – citizens, regulators and industry – is to understand that our main challenge is the management of change and, for the foreseeable future, management of decline.

Change is always stressful and decline particularly so. Making sure that safety standards do not slip will be more difficult – and more crucial – than ever as we approach the twentieth anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* spill five years from now.

**Community Corner**

**On Kodiak Island, rural science fair tackles the deepest questions of life**

By **Linda Robinson**  
Community Liaison

Which fur is warmer, fox, seal or sea otter? Which brings water to a boil more quickly, seal oil or vegetable oil? Will concentration exercises improve rifle accuracy? Which beverage gives the best energy boost? These are some of the questions examined at the Kodiak Island Rural Science Fair held in Old Harbor, January 21-23.

I was honored to be invited to be a science judge at this annual event. Along with two science judges, two elder judges rated the projects on their alignment with Alutiiq values and for the contribution to the community. Students from Port Lions, Akhiok, Chiniak, Larsen Bay, Ouzinkie and Old Harbor participated.

Old Harbor is on the southeast side of Kodiak Island on Sitkalidak Strait. The community was settled by Koniags more than 5,000 years ago and in 1784 was the site of the first Russian colony in Alaska. It is estimated that the population on the southeast side of Kodiak Island was cut in half from over 8,000 to about 4,000 during the first three decades of Russian colonization, as the Russians forced the Koniags into slavery. A sacred site, rediscovered after the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, is Refuge Rock, where Russians attacked the settlement and shot three hundred men and women, taking children as hostages.

The current population is about 250, and most of the population has lived in Old Harbor for their entire lives. The economy now is centered around commercial fishing and subsistence. Tourism is on the rise.

As we observed the 19 science projects and asked questions of the students, elders Nick Aloki and Papa George Inga told us about the history of Old Harbor and Kodiak Island. Old Harbor's historic Three Saints Russian Orthodox church was the only building left standing after the 1964 tsunami that



Linda Robinson

followed the earthquake. The elders said the force of the wave emptied the bay and they could see the rocks on the bottom. Parts of homes were seen floating in the bay, with lanterns still burning in the windows. The village was rebuilt in three sections, each dedicated to the memory of one of

the three Orthodox saints, St. Basel, St. Gregory and St. John. Each section has its own praying chapel.

The town has a modern school with approximately 72 students, two stores, a lodge and several charter services. Old Harbor has a reputation for its wonderful hospitality, and it is well deserved.

**On the road again**

The council's booth was assembled at the Alaska Forum on the Environment, February 9-11 at the Egan Center in Anchorage. Upcoming conferences to which the booth will be taken are the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Conference, March 1-3 in Sitka; the 15 Years After the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Observance, March 11 at the Anchorage Hilton; and Kodiak Comfish, March 17-20 in Kodiak.

**Science fair answers**

Sea otter, seal oil, yes, and Red Bull.



Dennis Eluska and Ryan Amodo from Akhiok won a science fair prize for their project on whether concentration exercises can improve rifle accuracy. Photo by Linda Robinson, citizens' council.

**Council Meeting Schedule**

The citizen's council board of directors meets four times each year. Here is the schedule for the coming year:

- May 2004: Valdez, May 20-21
- September 2004: Kenai, September 16-17
- December 2004: Anchorage, Dec. 2-3.
- March 2005: Anchorage, Mar. 10-11

**Prince William Sound  
Regional Citizens' Advisory Council**

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is an independent, non-profit corporation formed after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill to minimize the environmental impacts of the trans-Alaska pipeline terminal and tanker fleet.

The council has 18 member organizations, including communities affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill and groups representing Alaska Native, aquaculture, environmental, commercial fishing, recreation and tourism interests in the spill region.

The council is certified under the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 as the citizen advisory group for Prince William Sound, and operates under a contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. The contract, which is in effect as long as oil flows through the pipeline, guarantees the council's independence, provides annual funding, and ensures the council the same access to terminal facilities as state and federal regulatory agencies.

*The council's mission: Citizens promoting environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.*

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