

# THE OBSERVER

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## North Slope crude oil spills into Port Valdez

On September 21, approximately 100 gallons of North Slope Crude oil was spilled into Port Valdez. The spill occurred during a planned annual leak-test of the pipes that load oil onto tankers out at the end of loading Berth 5 at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

To conduct the annual test, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company uses the berth's fire system to pump seawater into the crude piping to a pressure of 190 PSI, or pounds per square inch. That pressure is held for a prescribed amount of time to allow inspectors to visually check the pipes for leaks. However, that day Alyeska was unable to achieve the necessary 190 PSI test pressure and an apparent operational error led to a mixture of crude oil and seawater being spilled into Port Valdez. Alyeska is conducting a thorough investigation of the spill.



Fishing vessels helped collect the spilled oil. Alyeska trains these fishing crews every year in spill response tactics. Among other tasks, the crews are trained to pull oil spill boom to collect spilled oil floating on top of the water. Photo courtesy of Alyeska.

### Cleaning up

The exact amount of oil spilled is unknown, and will likely remain that way. Spill responders recovered just over 400 gallons of mixed oil and water. To date, Alyeska has



Oil collected inside boom. Photo by Jeremy Robida.

measured that approximately 100 gallons of that recovered mixture was crude oil.

Hundreds of personnel responded to the spill, working around the clock, including 13 local fishing vessels that helped collect and clean up the spilled oil.

**See page 9,  
Berth 5 spill**



# Council representatives visit Louisiana shipyards

Visitors come away impressed with new construction and Edison Chouest Offshore personnel

New information shared with the Council along with tours of Edison Chouest facilities has begun to alleviate some concerns related to the change of marine services contractors in Prince William Sound, some concerns remain.



During the May visit, the Council observed the massive tugs under construction in the shipyard. Left to right: Mike Day of Alyeska, Board member Patience Andersen Faulkner, staff member Roy Robertson, committee volunteer Jim Herbert, and Brett Lirette of Edison Chouest Offshore. Photo by Kate Dugan.

## Tours of facilities

Council representatives visited Louisiana in May, June, and October to tour Edison Chouest's shipyards, headquarters, and training facilities, where the company is building the new escort tugs and response vessels that will make up the Prince William Sound oil spill prevention and response system starting next year.

The visitors were given unfettered access to Edison Chouest's staff and the opportunity to ask questions about their operations. Those present were impressed with the facilities and the company culture focusing on safety and cultivating competent staff. The quality of workmanship and use of new technologies were also on display.

## Employee training

Council staffer Jeremy Robida observed a "train-the-trainer" session in July. Alyeska trained Edison Chouest personnel on the prevention and response duties for which their employees will be responsible. Attendees were all directly involved in the transition, with future duties such as management of operations, crewing or captaining a vessel, or teaching this material to new hires bound for Alaska.

The event was a mix of classroom discussions and hands-on field time with equipment such as oil skimmers.

"Edison Chouest employees seemed to take pride in the company and their work," said Robida. "There was excitement about Alaska and the Alyeska/SERVS contract. This excitement was satisfying to see, and hopefully that same spirit of interest will continue through the lifespan of this contract."

## New technology on the vessels

Improvements in the new tugs will include forward-looking infrared and digital radar signal processing systems to improve the detection of icebergs as an oil spill prevention measure, as well as to enhance the ability to detect spilled oil on water should prevention measures fail.

The escort tugs will be equipped with "render-recover" winches. A render-recover winch is designed to monitor and automatically adjust line tension. This reduces potential operator mistakes and improves safety. The Council is also pleased that Samson Rope Technologies, Inc. will be the provider for their towlines.

**See page 8, Marine services transition**

# Oil spill contingency plans for Prince William Sound under review

**Many changes stemming from transition of marine services contractor to Edison Chouest**

By Linda Swiss  
Council Project Manager

Updates to two oil spill prevention and response contingency plans are currently underway. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, or ADEC, solicited public comments regarding the changes to the spill prevention and response plans this past summer.

The plans are prepared by the operators of Alyeska's marine terminal and oil tankers and are subject to state approval. These plans specify what operators will do to prevent and clean up oil spills. There are separate plans for spills from the Valdez Marine Terminal and from the tankers that carry oil. Both plans undergo an approval process approximately every five years. With the marine services transition in Prince William Sound, Edison Chouest Offshore's new equipment means the details in the plans will change, triggering a public review.

In 43 pages of formal comments submitted to ADEC in August and September, the Council made a number of recommendations to either maintain the same level of preparedness or improve the proposed plans.

## Tanker plan amendments

Major changes are proposed to the tanker plan due to the ongoing marine services transition.

In its comments, the Council stated that "changing such a significant portion of the prevention and response system in Prince William Sound at one time defies a clear regulatory precedent."

To help manage this, the Council suggested a well-documented process which shows that each new asset meets requirements prior to the release of its counterpart from the current system. This process would include demonstrations of new equipment and capabilities of the crews operating the equipment.

One of the positive changes is an additional task force dedicated to protecting areas that are particularly sensitive to crude oil.

Among the Council's other concerns:

- More computer modelling is needed to verify that all vessels are capable for their assigned tasks.
- The number of personnel is reduced, and the Council

is concerned there may not be enough personnel on skimming barges.

- Training requirements are reduced for escort crews.
- The plan contains fewer details about training, including removal of job roles, which describe tasks and training needed to perform those tasks.

## The terminal plan

The first of two amendments to the terminal plan focus on changes to one of the oil spill "scenarios" in the contingency plans. These seven scenarios illustrate hypothetical responses to spills, including to land and water, that could occur. The industry must show how prepared they are to respond to all seven of these scenarios before the plans are approved and oil can be shipped.

Changes are being made to a scenario that depicts a catastrophic failure of the crude oil piping system that carries oil from the storage tanks to the loading berths. In the current plan, industry has committed to protect

**See page 10, Contingency plans**



These plans are prepared by oil tanker operators subject to state approval. The operators specify what they will do to prevent and clean up oil spills. There is a separate plan for spills from the Valdez Marine Terminal and for the tankers that carry oil. Both plans undergo a periodic review and update process approximately every five years. Usually, the reviews do not happen simultaneously, however, Edison Chouest's new equipment means the plans' details will change, triggering the public review.

From the Executive Director

## We trust, but we must also verify, new improvements in system

**Thorough training, paired with a robust array of drills and exercises, will produce the safest prevention and response system**

In most professions, it takes time, training, and on-the-job learning to do a job well. A doctor or an electrician may earn a degree, but it can take years to become proficient. They must practice and observe a variety of situations before they are trusted to perform surgery or operate independently with live electrical current.

The oil spill prevention and response profession is no different.

In this next year, Edison Chouest Offshore will be bringing in new tugs and barges custom-built for Prince William Sound, new equipment, and new personnel, all playing key roles in spill prevention and response for the Valdez Marine Terminal and associated oil tankers.

The Council is looking forward to the many improvements in the equipment that will arrive with these vessels. We are anticipating being able to confidently say that every measure has been taken to prevent an oil spill, and if the worst happens, the industry is fully prepared to clean up any spilled oil.

Edison Chouest is planning equipment sea trials as well as classroom and simulator training for personnel in the Gulf of Mexico before equipment arrives in Prince William Sound. We are confident that Edison Chouest will provide professional mariners with required training and qualifications for their specific roles, but they may have limited experience working with the new equipment in the Prince William Sound environment.

Because of the significance and scope of these changes, the Council is recommending a robust process to verify equipment and personnel capabilities and performance in our waters. Such a process, conducted in a controlled and safe manner, would provide assurance that that existing safeguards are not weakened. It could also help identify any adjustments that may be warranted to reliably perform in the expected environmental operating conditions.

### **Preparedness is invaluable**

The best time to prepare for an emergency is before the emergency happens. Tug captains must be experts at performing proven maneuvers in a variety of weather conditions to be able to safely rescue a tanker in a true emer-

gency. Crew members must be confident and proficient, and understand the various challenges they may be faced with while working to connect a towline to a disabled tanker in the bitter cold, blowing snow, and dark of an Alaska winter, in high wind and waves.

Implementation of a robust training regimen, paired with a variety of drills and exercises in varying weather conditions, will help provide the confidence and understanding necessary to handle these situations safely. Crew must be given the opportunity to make mistakes, and learn lessons, when the risk of a pending oil spill is not at stake.

### **Our mission and motto**

The Council's mission is to promote the environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers. We also have an unofficial motto to trust but verify.

The Council is encouraged by the improvements coming in the way of new technology and equipment, and we trust that the new personnel will be professional mariners trained for their specific job roles. However, a successful oil spill prevention and response system takes more than just equipment, trained personnel, an effective management system, and carefully written plans. It also takes practice, practice, practice, in the expected operating environment.

The Council believes it is environmentally unsafe to move oil in conditions in which it is unsafe to exercise a tanker save. We want to ensure the safety of the personnel entrusted with protecting the environment, in part by allowing solutions to be developed during controlled exercises. Waiting to experience unexpected issues during a real-time emergency is contradictory to safety goals. Working together with industry and regulators, we look forward to continuing to improve the oil spill prevention and response system in Prince William Sound.

• *Donna Schantz is the executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council.*



Donna Schantz

From Alyeska Pipeline Service Company

## Well-trained teams mount aggressive response to terminal spill

On September 26, I visited with our team in Valdez, where almost 300 individuals stepped up to respond to a terminal spill that occurred near Berth 5 on September 21. Responders included Alyeska's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System (SERVS) staff, other Alyeska and contractor personnel, vessels and crews from the Vessel of Opportunity program, U.S. Coast Guard and Alaska



Tom Barrett

Department of Environmental Conservation agency personnel, and representatives from the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council.

That such a spill occurred on our watch into the waters of Port Valdez was a punch in the gut to me personally, to our entire organization, and especially to those at the Terminal and SERVS, who I know, along with our stakeholders, work diligently every day to prevent harm to these special waters. The spill was a serious and unacceptable event. The cause is under investigation and we will quickly and aggressively make whatever changes are needed to prevent a repeat of this occurrence. The status quo that could allow such an event should be intolerable to every one of us.

But I want to express my thanks and deep appreciation for what I sensed over recent days, and saw firsthand in September -- a strong team pulling itself up off the ground and aggressively applying our training, lessons from many drills, personal and team skills, and grit to minimize impacts, remove oil from our waters, and restore loading

operations. There was rigorous emphasis on source control, containment and recovery. There was close cooperation with our regulators and stakeholders, there was transparent, honest and timely communication in a rapidly changing and sometimes uncertain situation, and response agility in the face of complex system aspects and rocky near-shore geography that imposed a very high degree of difficulty on response actions.

The commitment and hard work paid off: there was no harm to wildlife, and on September 25, we began loading tankers after the Coast Guard and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation concurred cleanup efforts were satisfactory (although some shoreline work and equipment decontamination and reset activities continued).

While many people worked long hours at the command post, I want to give special credit to those in the field. Typical of Valdez, the weather was harsh, cold, and very wet, with near-constant rains. But people kept at it, worked very hard, and for their persistence, we can all be grateful.

• Tom Barrett is the the President of Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

*"The spill was a serious and unacceptable event. The cause is under investigation and we will quickly and aggressively make whatever changes are needed to prevent a repeat of this occurrence."*

## We need your feedback!

We want to make our newsletter as helpful, informative, and useful as possible for YOU, our readers! Take a quick, 5-minute survey to let us know what information you are most interested in.

Please visit [www.bit.ly/ObserverFeedback](http://www.bit.ly/ObserverFeedback) to fill out the survey. Thank you for your time.

Questions or comments about anything in The Observer? Another topic that you want to hear about? Let us know!

Contact us: [newsletter@pwsrca.org](mailto:newsletter@pwsrca.org)



Photo by Glenn Carstens-Peters on Unsplash

Community Corner

# Alaska youth explore the Sound

By Lisa Matlock  
Outreach Coordinator

As the skiff sailed across Cabin Bay, high-pitched twittering and piping sounds echoed over the water. Four football-shaped black birds with white wing patches on the water near the point seemed engrossed in calls emanating from speakers and several decoys sitting rigidly on the rock. One of the teens pointed and yelled, "There they are!"



Lisa Matlock

Sam Stark, an Oregon State University researcher leading the teens on their bird adventure, smiled and congratulated her on her keen eye. Stark developed several activities for these lucky middle schoolers, to teach them how scientists work to restore

populations of wildlife affected by a major oil spill.

At the end of that day, one of the teens exclaimed that they never knew science could be so interesting.

## Expedition is one of many

Since 2009, the Council has helped support projects that involve youth in our mission and understanding of our work. This support has grown from a couple of projects in the first year to include ten partner projects from Kodiak to Cordova last year.

One of the projects that the Council has helped support since 2010, is Alaska Geographic's Prince William Sound Youth Marine Stewardship Expedition. This expedition introduces middle schoolers to Prince William Sound to

explore and learn. Youth from Cordova, Valdez, Whittier, Homer, Kodiak, Soldotna, Girdwood, Seward, Cooper Landing, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Palmer have traveled aboard the Babkin each summer for a week, exposed to science of all kinds happening in the Sound. Youth involved in the expedition are nominated by teachers who think they would most benefit from the experience.

Part of the curriculum includes the science and history of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The students experience effects of lingering oil in the Sound along with an introduction to current oil spill prevention and response efforts in place to protect its marine environment today.

Council volunteer Kate Alexander Morse has been the science instructor on previous expeditions.

"This expedition provides big opportunities for personal growth in kids who may not have been on an adventure of this kind," Morse says. "It pushes their boundaries and provides a chance for them to explore who they are at a fragile time in life. And it provides learning outside the classroom. I feel that an important part of being a Council volunteer is to help foster the importance of stewardship for Prince William Sound in these kids, for the long term health of the Sound."



The Babkin's captain, Alexandra von Wichman (left), also works as an Alyeska/SERVS nearshore oil spill responder and shares her experience throughout the trip. This year, the group met Susan Harvey (above, far left), an expert in oil spill prevention and response who introduced the kids to her Prince William Sound setnet site. All photos courtesy of Alaska Geographic.

## Becoming stewards of the environment

“Several of our most long-term youth involved in programs became hooked on this kind of learning through their Babkin trip,” says Ann Mayo-Kiely of Alaska Geographic.

After these kids return to their regular lives, many take advantage of continued opportunities for outdoor adventure, leadership skills building, and science education. One former expeditioner presented at the Council’s 2010 Science Night and another from Cordova became an invasive species intern for the Council.

Besides the Council, partner support for the expedition this year included: Alaska Geographic, Chugach Children’s Forest, Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp., Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Oregon State University (with support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey), Copper River Watershed Project, and Susan Harvey.

I was lucky enough to serve as the science instructor for this year’s expedition, and it was gratifying to see what the kids learn and how they grow in the Sound. This Council project benefits our youth for life, and our mission.

### “On this trip I learned the most about \_\_\_.”



“How much humans affect the environment.”

- Jacob



“The effects of the oil spill.”

- Antoinette



“All the different kinds of jobs and wildlife that I never knew about.”

- Kintla



“How researchers bring back populations [of wildlife] after an oil spill.”

- Rene



“Setnetters, and I think I want to be one.”

- Linnaea



“Pigeon guillemots, also known as PIGUs.”

- Savannah



“I learned the most about nature.”

- Anjel



“Patience.”

- Joshua



“Birds.”

- Khalil



## Marine services transition: Council promoting more vessel testing

*Continued from page 2*

### Remaining concerns

The visits and new information have helped ease some concerns, however some questions still remain.

The Council is developing specific recommendations to ensure the equipment can safely operate in Alaska waters and the crews are trained and qualified. A team of experts with extensive experience in the prevention and response industry in Prince William Sound, a former government regulator, and a world-renowned naval architect are assisting the Council in the research.

The experts are looking at a range of tools, including on-water field demonstrations in varying weather conditions, computer simulations and modeling, drills, and exercises, and scale model-tank tests which could be used to give the Council confidence that the new vessels and personnel can handle the work in the environmental conditions of Prince William Sound.

Edison Chouet is planning to conduct sea trials for the tugs in the Gulf of Mexico before equipment is moved to Alaska. As the vessels arrive in Prince William Sound,

The marine services contract includes escort tugs, general purpose tugs, a utility tug, oil recovery storage barges, and associated personnel, all of which are key oil spill prevention and response assets for Prince William Sound. For instance, two state-of-the-art escort tugs accompany every laden tanker that leaves Port Valdez. One tug is tethered through the confined waterway called the Valdez Narrows, and one tug stands by at Hinchinbrook Entrance until the tanker is 17 miles into the Gulf of Alaska. The primary responsibility of these escort tugs is to rescue or “save” a tanker that may experience problems and prevent oil from spilling, as well as initiate response efforts should these prevention measures fail.

starting in early 2018, on-water demonstrations and oil spill training exercises will begin in Prince William Sound. Council representatives plan to attend these events.



Council volunteer Jim Herbert stands next to large winches waiting to be installed on a tug headed for Alaska. Photo by Roy Robertson.



## Berth 5 spill: Resources were top priority for protection from oil

### *Continued from page 1*

As a protective measure, responders also deployed boom to deflect oil away from two nearby areas that are particularly sensitive to environmental damage, although no oil came near those locations. Those areas, the Solomon Gulch fish hatchery, and the Duck Flats, a marshy area where waterfowl are concentrated, have special plans known as “geographic response strategies,” containing specific response methods developed ahead of time that are tailored for each unique area. These plans save valuable time during a spill response.

More about geographic response strategies: [www.bit.ly/GRSInAlaska](http://www.bit.ly/GRSInAlaska)



Coast Guard personnel oversee the deployment of boom to protect the Solomon Gulch fish hatchery. Photo by Jeremy Robida.

### **Response appropriate for incident**

Council staff was on hand throughout the event, monitoring the situation.

“From the Council’s perspective, given mild weather conditions, calm sea state, and extent of the oiling, it appears that overall the response to this spill was appropriate,” said Donna Schantz, executive director for the Council. “Resources were deployed quickly and sensibly, and local environmentally sensitive areas were prioritized for protection.”

“The safety of personnel was also a priority, and no major injuries occurred,” she added. “While this spill was an unfortunate event, the response of Alyeska, ADEC, and USCG has generally been well-coordinated and methodical.”

The Council is currently compiling and evaluating information regarding the cause of the spill, the response, and any environmental impacts that resulted. While no amount of oil spilled to water is acceptable, the Council is taking the opportunity to learn from the event in order to promote measures designed to prevent and respond to oil spills from the terminal in the future.

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Thank you!

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Contact us: [newsletter@pwsrca.org](mailto:newsletter@pwsrca.org)



## Contingency plans: Council providing advice on proposed plans



The contingency plans are legally required, and contain details on how each piece of equipment will be used. These plans would include details such as descriptions of spill prevention and response tactics for vessels such as the *Elrington*, one of the tugs headed for Alaska, pictured here in the shipyard. Photo by Amanda Bauer.

### Continued from page 3

two environmentally-sensitive areas that are particularly susceptible to crude oil with boom to divert oil away within the first critical hours after a crude oil spill. The proposed version could delay this protection by several hours.

The second of the two amendments focused on the changes due to the marine services transition. Among other concerns, the Council noted:

- Descriptions and goals for training responders were deleted.
- Job roles were removed as in the tanker plan.

The Council recommended that the current level of detail be retained.

### Next steps

As the Observer went to press, the Council had just received news that one of the three amendments had been approved. For updates, please visit our website: [www.pwsrca.org](http://www.pwsrca.org).

## COUNCIL BOARD MEETINGS

The Council meets three times annually. The January meeting is held in Anchorage, May in Valdez, and the September meeting is rotated among communities affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

### Board of Directors

The Council's 18 members are communities and interest groups affected by the Exxon Valdez spill:

- Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
- Community of Chenega Bay
- Chugach Alaska Corporation
- City of Cordova
- City of Homer
- City of Kodiak
- City of Seldovia
- City of Seward
- City of Valdez
- City of Whittier
- Cordova District Fishermen United
- Kenai Peninsula Borough
- Kodiak Island Borough
- Kodiak Village Mayors Association
- Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition
- Port Graham Corporation
- Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp.
- Community of Tatitlek

Board meetings are open to the public, and an opportunity for public comments is provided at the beginning of each meeting. Agendas and other meeting materials are available on our website: [www.pwsrca.org](http://www.pwsrca.org)

The tentative Board meeting schedule for the coming year is:

- January 18 & 19, 2018:  
Anchorage
- May 3 & 4, 2018:  
Valdez
- September 20 & 21, 2018:  
Seldovia



## PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND REGIONAL CITIZENS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

*Our mission: Citizens promoting environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.*

### Who we are

The 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 is a voice for the people, communities, and interest groups in the region oiled by the Exxon Valdez spill.

*Those with the most to lose from oil pollution must have a voice in the decisions that can put their livelihoods and communities at risk.*

### The Council's role

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.

We combat the complacency that led to the 1989 spill by fostering partnerships among the oil industry, government, and local communities in addressing environmental concerns.

### Our research

The Council's advice depends on quality research and accurate science about oil transportation safety and the environmental impacts of the Valdez Marine Terminal and tankers, as well as local knowledge and expertise.

The Council regularly retains experts in various fields to conduct independent research on issues related to oil transportation safety and performs a variety of functions aimed at reducing pollution from crude-oil transportation activities in and through Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska.



### Advisory Committees

While the strategic direction of the Council's work is set by the Board, much of the Council's work is done through permanent volunteer committees made up of Board members, technical experts, and local citizens with an interest in making oil transportation safer in Alaska.

These standing committees work with staff on projects, study and deliberate current oil transportation issues, and formulate their own advice and recommendations to the Council's full Board of Directors.

Our committees provide an avenue for public participation in the Council's work.

#### Terminal Operations & Environmental Monitoring:

The Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee identifies actual and potential sources of episodic and chronic pollution at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

#### Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems:

The Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems Committee monitors port and tanker operations in Prince William Sound. The committee identifies and recommends improvements in the vessel traffic navigation systems and monitors the vessel escort system.

#### Scientific Advisory:

The Scientific Advisory Committee sponsors independent scientific research and provides scientific assistance and advice to the other council committees on technical reports, scientific methodology, data interpretation, and position papers.

#### Oil Spill Prevention and Response:

The Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee works to minimize the risks and impacts associated with oil transportation by reviewing and recommending strong spill prevention and response measures, adequate contingency planning, and effective regulations.

#### Information and Education:

The Information and Education Committee's mission is to support the council's mission by fostering public awareness, responsibility, and participation in the council's activities through information and education.

*A voice for citizens: [www.pwsrcac.org](http://www.pwsrcac.org)*

Alaska State Chamber of Commerce - Chenega Bay - Chugach Alaska Corp. - Cordova - Cordova District Fishermen United - Homer  
Kenai Peninsula Borough - Kodiak - Kodiak Island Borough - Kodiak Village Mayors' Association - Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition  
Port Graham Corp. - Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp. - Seldovia - Seward - Tatitlek - Valdez - Whittier