



*"Citizens promoting environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers."*

3709 Spenard Road, Suite 100  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503  
907-277-7222/Fax: 907-277-4523

P.O. Box 3089 / 130 S. Meals, Suite 202  
Valdez, Alaska 99686  
907-834-5000 / Fax: 907-835-5957

AK Chamber of Commerce · AK Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Assoc. · Chenega Bay · Chugach AK Corp. · Cordova · Cordova District Fishermen United · Homer · Kenai Pen. Boro. · Kodiak · Kodiak Isl. Boro. · Kodiak Village Mayors · Oil Spill Region Env. Coalition · PWS Aquaculture Corp. · Port Graham Corp. · Seldovia · Seward · Tatitlek · Valdez · Whittier

## News Release

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Contact: Stan Jones

907-273-6230 / [jones@pwsrca.org](mailto:jones@pwsrca.org)

### **Citizen oversight group seeks "continuous improvement" in renewal of tanker oil spill plans for Prince William Sound**

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is calling for several updates and improvements as oil spill plans for tankers operating in the Sound undergo their every-five-year renewals.

These plans—usually known as contingency 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 from their vessels.

"This process is part of our mandate under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and is crucial to effective oil spill prevention and response," said Mark Swanson, executive director of the council. "So we take it very seriously."

In 18 pages of formal comments to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation on Oct. 12, the council made a number of recommendations to the state agency for improving the contingency plans before they gain final approval.

One recommendation dealt with downstream response, meaning oil-spill clean-up in communities outside Prince William Sound.

While much of the news coverage of the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill focused on effects inside the Sound, the spilled oil was carried out of the Sound by tidal and coastal currents within a week of the grounding on Bligh Reef. Ultimately it spread to Cook Inlet, Kodiak, and even the village of Chignik, some 460 miles southwest of the spill site. While state regulations require clean-up of oil that escapes the Sound, those requirements are much less specific than for oil still within the Sound.

In its comments, the council encouraged the state and the tanker operators "to set a timetable for the implementation of drills and exercises to ensure that all parties are prepared to mount an effective response in downstream communities."

Another focus of council comments was the plan for using commercial fishing vessels in the clean-up of oil spills in the Sound, including spills that spread outside it. Under state requirements, tanker operators must be prepared to clean up 300,000 barrels of oil within three days. The plan drafted by the operators claims that having 275 fishing vessels under contract will meet that

standard. The council disagrees. Historically, the operators and the state have agreed that, on any given day, only about 75 percent of vessels on contract can be counted upon to be available and ready to respond in the required time frame. By the council's estimate, 371 vessels would have to be under contract to make sure enough were ready to respond when actually needed. The council recommends such a requirement be incorporated in the new contingency plan.

The council's other recommendations dealt with such issues as protection of sensitive areas before spilled oil arrives; on-water recovery of spilled oil; incorporation of Best Available Technology; the incident command system for managing oil-spill cleanups; availability of tankers and barges of opportunity that can be pressed into service for hauling away oil recovered during a cleanup; operating in darkness; and Realistic Maximum Response Operating Limitations, meaning the most severe weather and sea conditions in which it is realistically possible to conduct cleanup operations.

"We have a good system in Prince William Sound and it's not broken," Swanson said. "But the last tune-up was five years ago. There have been many spill drills and exercises and lessons learned over that time, so it's not surprising a few updates are in order today."

Links for downloading materials related to this news release:

[Council cover letter to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation:](https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D8221604_68566238_963266)

[https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D8221604\\_68566238\\_963266](https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D8221604_68566238_963266)

[Council comments on draft tanker contingency plans:](https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D8221604_68566238_444257)

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The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, with offices in Anchorage and Valdez, is an independent non-profit corporation whose mission is to promote environmentally safe operation of the Valdez Marine Terminal and the oil tankers that use it. The council's work is guided by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and its contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. The council's 19 member organizations are communities in the region affected by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, as well as aquaculture, commercial fishing, environmental, Native, recreation, and tourism groups.◊