



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

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News Release

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Prince William Sound RCAC board issues position on safe crude oil tanker transit and escort vessel operation in the Sound

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council voted unanimously on January 18, 2018, to pass a resolution stating that oil tankers and escort vessels should not be permitted to transit through Prince William Sound and into the Gulf of Alaska in weather conditions which have been determined by industry to be unsafe for training.

The resolution was prompted by the upcoming change in marine service contract providers by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, including crude oil tanker escort vessel services, effective July 2018. Council executive director Donna Schantz stated, "The oil tanker escort system in Prince William Sound is an essential oil spill prevention measure that is vital to reducing the risk of another catastrophic event, such as the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill."

"If it is unsafe to train personnel, it is unsafe to transport oil," said council board president Amanda Bauer. "This position does not just apply to the incoming contractor, but sets the standard to which the council feels all future new contractors, equipment and crews should be held. We believe strongly that these standards are needed to ensure the economic and environmental safety of the communities and groups we represent."

As stated in the resolution, the council believes it is unsafe to require crews to respond to a vessel emergency in Prince William Sound during adverse weather with inadequate or no training or experience in these conditions, and that new crews must receive training and experience in the full range of operating conditions in which they are expected to perform. The council also believes it is reasonable, prudent, and safe to limit laden tanker transits through Prince William Sound and into the Gulf of Alaska to the same range of weather conditions in which escort vessels are certified and crews are trained.

“We agree with industry and regulators that crew safety is the first priority,” said Schantz. “We believe that drills and exercises, including in adverse weather, are controlled events, as they can be stopped at any time that the risk to crews or vessels becomes unacceptably high.”

The council acknowledges that the transition to Edison Chouest Offshore will bring many vessel and equipment improvements to the oil spill prevention and response system for Prince William Sound. However, any time a system goes through transition, in any industry, risk is introduced. This is especially true for a transition of this magnitude, happening in such a tight timeframe. Although the council is confident that Edison Chouest Offshore’s personnel are well-trained, professional mariners, the council is concerned about a large changeover in such a short amount of time. Use of unfamiliar equipment in a harsh and unfamiliar environment could be challenging.

As the resolution is based on historical research, reports, regulatory decisions, trainings and capability demonstrations, the council also developed and approved with the resolution a detailed position paper entitled, “Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council Position – Safe Crude Oil Tanker Operation in Prince William Sound.” This document contains further information and history on this topic: <http://bit.ly/SafeTankerTransit>

The council resolution 18-01, “Supporting Safe Tanker Transit Through Prince William Sound,” can be viewed here: http://bit.ly/Resolution_1801

The council board meeting is being held in Anchorage on January 18-19, 2018. For more information, visit www.pwsrcac.org.

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 18 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.
