



Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

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

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

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

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Contact: Stan Jones

907-273-6230 / jones@pwsrca.org

## **Citizen oversight group questions details of proposed new oil-spill prevention and cleanup plans for Prince William Sound**

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is calling on the state of Alaska to proceed with caution before approving the latest batch of plans from the oil industry for preventing and cleaning up oil spills in the Sound.

The proposed plans were submitted to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation by companies that operate tankers for major oil companies such as Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, and BP.

In a March 23 letter transmitting its formal comments to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the citizens' group noted that the proposed new plans in several respects appear to represent a retreat from existing prevention and cleanup standards established in 2007, when the plans were last revised and renewed.

The citizens' council, wrote Executive Director Mark Swanson, "found a number of areas where the plan contains contradictory or confusing information...and where the detail that was present in previous plan versions has been removed or diluted."

"The removal of information or reduction of detail represents a step backward in the planning process, and could lead to a reduced response capability in the event of an actual spill," the group wrote in formal comments submitted with Swanson's letter.

One example of an evident cutback is that the new plans appear to show a reduction in the number of contracted oil-spill cleanup workers. The 2007 plan shows 180 such workers, while the proposed 2012 plan shows only about 133 workers, a cut of more than 25 percent. The council is concerned this would degrade cleanup capabilities as trained workers are necessary to make sure cleanup efforts continue around the clock, seven days a week.

An example of confusing language in the proposed new plans is the occasional use of multiple names for a single facility. A salmon hatchery near the village of Chenega Bay is referred to as the Sawmill Hatchery, the Chenega Bay Hatchery, and the Armin F. Koernig Hatchery.

And another hatchery is listed as both the Lake Bay Hatchery and the Wally Noerenburg Hatchery.

On March 23, the same day the council filed its letter and comments, the Department of Environmental Conservation put its review of the plans on indefinite hold while it analyzes public comments, including those from the citizens' council. The bulk of the comments are formally couched as "Requests for Additional Information," meaning the commenter does not believe the proposed plans, as submitted, include enough information to determine whether they would be effective tools for preventing and cleaning up oil spills.

The council's letter and comments also noted the new plans included improvements in some areas, such as the use of "redlining" to make changes easier to track, and the use of an updated Tactics Manual to provide a foundation for operational and tactical planning for oil-spill responses.

"Our goal is to foster continuous improvement of the oil spill prevention and response capacity in Prince William Sound," Swanson wrote in the council's letter.

In the next phase of the process, the Department of Environmental will issue its formal Request for Additional Information, based on its own review as well as comments submitted during the current phase. The tanker companies will revise the plans and resubmit them to the department for the next round of reviews. The current tanker contingency plans are scheduled to expire in November of this year.

The council's letter is attached to this news release.

Also, the letter, the council's formal comments, and other relevant documents are available online at:

[www.pwsrcac.org/projects/OSRplan/cplan-tanker.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/projects/OSRplan/cplan-tanker.html).

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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.