



"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

**For Immediate Release**

**March 12, 2010**

Contact: Stan Jones

907-273-6230 / jones@pwsrca.org

## **Immediate action needed to ensure Alyeska fishing vessel fleet is ready for oil-spill response**

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is seeking immediate action to remedy a long-developing crisis in the fishing vessel program that is crucial to oil-spill response in Prince William Sound and adjoining waters.

Fishing vessels played a vital role after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, providing most of the equipment and manpower for protecting sensitive areas and for recovering and cleaning up oil.

Under the state-mandated contingency plan for cleaning up tanker oil spills, Alyeska is committed to maintain contracts with at least 350 trained fishing vessels from communities in what is known as the Exxon Valdez oil spill region: Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, and Kodiak Island. The plan requires that 275 of those vessels be ready to leave port within 24 hours of notification. (The reason that 350 are to be kept under contract is to allow for the possibility that, at any given moment, some vessels may be unavailable for maintenance or other reasons.)

After a check in late January, Alyeska reported a 20-vessel shortfall in the Prince William Sound-based part of the fleet. However, a careful analysis of contingency-plan requirements by the council suggests the actual shortfall could have been as large as 33 vessels.

Moreover, 28 of the response-ready vessels in the Alyeska tally were open skiffs. But, under state guidelines, no more than 25 skiffs would be acceptable in a fleet of 169 vessels. In addition, the council has serious doubts about the suitability of open skiffs for most oil-spill response operations in winter conditions or stormy weather.

Alyeska has proposed measures to mitigate the shortfall that was discovered in January and has worked to bring more vessels into the program. But the company has just begun attempting to formulate a long-term plan to stabilize it at the level required for effective oil-spill response.

The January shortfall is only the latest sign of trouble in the program. The council has been warning Alyeska and its regulators of problems since 2005, when fishing vessel captains at a council-sponsored meeting complained

of declining participation in the program and warned that, without changes, it could atrophy to the point of being ineffective for oil-spill response.

The captains said the biggest problems in the program were inadequate compensation, exclusion from the decision-making process, and lack of respect.

In 2009, the council retained a contractor to conduct a readiness audit of the entire fishing vessel fleet. The contingency plan splits the 275-vessel requirement into two tiers. Tier I, consisting of 50 vessels, must be ready to leave port to within 6 hours. Tier II, consisting of 225 vessels, must be ready to leave port within 24 hours. The readiness audit showed that, while the Tier I fleet appeared able to meet its 6-hour requirement, only about half of the 150 Tier II captains contacted in the survey could meet their 24-hour requirement.

More signs of a faltering fishing vessel program are evident in Alyeska's training records. In 2006, Alyeska gave 328 vessels the training necessary for participation in the program. By 2009, only 267 vessels were trained, a level far below the contingency-plan requirement for 350 trained vessels.

"This problem must be fixed," said Steve Lewis, president of the council. "The Exxon Valdez spill taught us the value of fishing captains, with their specialized knowledge of local waters and conditions, in oil-spill cleanup work. We at the council intend to make sure that lesson is never forgotten."

In an effort to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the fishing vessel program, the citizens' council and Alyeska are attempting to set up a collaborative project to address the problem.

As currently envisioned, the council and Alyeska would jointly retain a consultant to determine the causes of the decline. The consultant will also recommend a compensation scheme that is fair to Alyeska and to the fishermen and will ensure the long-term health of the program. In addition, the consultant will address other concerns raised by fishermen, such as respect and participation in decision-making.

"We feel these problems should have been addressed long ago, but we're glad that Alyeska is finally willing to act," Lewis said. "We'll do all in our power to bring this effort to a successful conclusion and make sure a robust fishing vessel program stays in the toolbox for cleaning up oil spills."

Numerous documents on the fishing vessel program are available at <http://tinyurl.com/FishVP> on the Internet.

---

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. For more information, visit the council at [www.pwsrca.org](http://www.pwsrca.org) on the Internet.◊