



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

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Citizens' council commends Alyeska Pipeline for ice-detection radar's return to service

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is hailing Alyeska Pipeline's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System for its work in bringing about repairs to the Sound's iceberg-detecting radar system.

The system had been out of service since September due to integration problems that arose when the Coast Guard upgraded its own radar equipment at a shared facility on Reef Island.

The iceberg radar resumed service on Sunday, March 14, and since then has been providing a display of the waters between Reef Island and Columbia Bay to Alyeska's Valdez operations base for SERVVS personnel and the tug fleet.

"We're grateful to the people of Alyeska for bringing this important element of the Prince William Sound safety system back online," said Donna Schantz, the council's acting executive director. "It bespeaks a commendable level of effort and commitment on Alyeska's part. The company really came through."

The system is not yet operating in the Coast Guard's Valdez Vessel Traffic Center, which oversees tanker traffic in the Sound, but the Coast Guard is working on acquiring updated software to resolve the problem, according to Coast Guard Lieutenant Erin Christensen.

Icebergs discharged in the retreat of Columbia Glacier have long been recognized as a threat to tankers in Prince William Sound. As early as 1984, the commander of the Coast Guard station in Valdez proposed installing a radar system in the area to scan for icebergs.

Reef Island overlooks Bligh Reef, scene of the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. The vessel left the standard tanker lanes to avoid ice that had been reported earlier by other vessels, but failed to change course again as scheduled and grounded on the reef, resulting in a crude oil spill estimated at 11 million gallons. In its report on the

grounding, the National Transportation Safety Board recommended installing a radar system near Bligh Reef to detect icebergs, as well as monitor vessel traffic.

After the spill, evidence continued to mount about the threat posed by icebergs. An empty tanker struck an iceberg in the Sound in 1994 and suffered over \$1 million in damage. And a technical study in the mid-1990s identified icebergs as one of the major remaining threats to tankers in the Sound.

After a long effort by the council, the Coast Guard, Alyeska, and numerous other stakeholders, the iceberg radar was installed on Reef Island in 2002, where it operated without incident until the problem developed last September after Coast Guard work at the site.

Information from ice scout vessels and from the radar system is used to determine when conditions are safe for tankers and other vessels to travel the Sound.

“We look forward to having the system back in service at the Coast Guard traffic center, as well as at Alyeska,” Schantz said. “We believe it can make a valuable contribution to dealing with the iceberg threat in Prince William Sound.

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 www.pwsrca.org on the Internet.◊