



# The Observer

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AK Chamber of Commerce - AK Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Assoc. - Chugach Alaska Corp. - Cordova District Fishermen United - OSREC - PWS Aquaculture Corp.

## Report: Dispersants didn't help in Exxon Valdez spill

By JESSICA CLER  
Council staff

A new report by the citizens' council concludes chemical dispersants were largely useless in the effort to clean up the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and that attempts to burn the spilled oil weren't much better.

For the report, council Project Manager Dan Gilson reviewed hundreds of pages of documents dating from the spill early on the morning of Friday, March 24, 1989.

Federal officials granted clearance to test dispersant in mid-afternoon on March 24, and the first application took place a few hours later south of Bligh Island, near the site where the Exxon Valdez grounded on Bligh Reef.

Several spray passes were made. Seas were calm and little mixing of dispersant with the spilled oil seemed to take place. Some observers noted that the application was ineffective and that the dispersant largely herded the oil. ('Herding' means the dispersant doesn't disperse the oil, but rather pushes it together into a smaller slick. This sometimes leads observers to mistakenly conclude that some oil has been dispersed.)

The second try with dispersant came the next day. But the light was so poor that observers had trouble evaluating the results. Two of them suggested the dispersant might have missed the oil slick.

Dispersant testing continued into March 26 and so did the problems. Spray nozzles failed to deliver the even pattern needed for dispersant to work effectively. As the oil was churned by storm action on March 27, it continued to emulsify, becoming increasingly resistant to the dispersant. (Emulsified oil is a brown goo that is sometimes called 'mousse' because of its resemblance to the chocolate dessert.) A C-130 aircraft was authorized to drop dispersant near Knight Island, but the drop was canceled after problems and delays and the failure of the plane to arrive at the target location. There was also a drop of dispersant four miles east of Naked Island that had not been authorized by state and federal officials running the cleanup effort. The results are unknown.

On Tuesday, March 28, another unsuccessful attempt took place. Some of the dispersant was sprayed into an unauthorized area and some of it hit



The vessel Baltic Sea collected water samples after dispersants tests during the Exxon Valdez response in April 1989. The samples showed no measurable dispersion of oil spilled by the grounded tanker. Photo courtesy of Merv Fingas.

members of the Coast Guard's Pacific Strike Team.

By Wednesday, March 29, state officials had become skeptical of Exxon's dispersant application efforts and it was generally agreed – even by Exxon – that dispersant use was no longer considered a response option.

Despite this, on Sunday, April 2, additional attempts were made. Several drops were conducted, but it seemed clear that most of the oil had by then formed into an emulsion, which resisted breakdown. On April

See page 3, **EXXON VALDEZ**

## Council and Alyeska settle disagreement over review of oil profits on North Slope

The citizens' council and Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. have resolved a long-running dispute over the council's right to investigate the profitability of oil companies operating on Alaska's North Slope.

As a result of the settlement, Alyeska has dropped its claim that the council can't use Alyeska contract funds for such investigations, and has paid half the council's legal expenses for the case.

At issue was a report by Dr. Richard Fineberg that the council commissioned in September 2004 at a cost of

\$25,000.

Fineberg, a Fairbanks-based economist, concluded in the report that the oil industry's North Slope operations are hugely profitable, even at times of lower oil prices. The council wanted the information to evaluate industry claims that financial pressures require cutbacks, or prevent improvements, that could affect the safety of the oil-transportation system the council is charged with overseeing in Prince William Sound.

Several months after the council

See page 6, **SUIT**

## Spill program sought in Puget Sound

A citizen oversight panel set up last year by the Washington legislature issued its first major report this fall, calling for major improvements in the state's systems for preventing and responding to oil spills.

The 272-page report, developed by the Washington State Oil Spill Advisory Council and released in early October, recommended several changes to how the state deals with the complicated issue. The primary ones were:

- Permanently station a rescue tug in the Western Strait of Juan de Fuca, the passageway between Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean.
- Create a tug fund in the state's

Department of Ecology for as-needed placement of rescue/response tugs in key locations.

- Fund a one-time program to eliminate a back-log of derelict vessels in state waters, and thereafter adequately fund an ongoing derelict vessel program.

- Give the oversight council a sufficient budget to carry out the mission assigned to it by the state legislature. The group is requesting \$1.8 million annually and a staff of five, up from about \$250,000 and a two-person staff now.

The council proposes to pay for the

See page 7, **PUGET SOUND**

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Volunteer Profile

# Ordinary citizen has a voice on council committee

By **SUSAN SOMMER**  
Project Manager

Jo Ann Benda, a member of the council’s Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee, still vividly recalls flying over Prince William Sound two months after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. “It seemed as if a child had used a black crayon and circled the islands,” she says. She never wants to see that again.

Her concern for the environment is simple: keep it safe for future generations.

As a teacher for more than 40 years, Jo Ann’s passion is seeing people succeed. The latter half of those years has been spent in Valdez, teaching developmental education at Prince William Sound Community College. Her desire for a healthy environment reflects her love of Valdez and all it offers—friendly neighbors, natural beauty, and no stop lights.

Unfortunately, according to Jo Ann, its semi-remote location also means there’s no Nordstrom, her favorite store.

During the 1989 spill, Jo Ann showered her husband, Bob Benda, with questions about the disaster and its implications. Bob was a science teacher at the community college then, but also worked on the spill response for a state agency. He later joined the citizens’ council as a member of the Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee, or TOEM, and is now its chair. Jo Ann began to

sit in on committee meetings as a visitor a few months before she officially joined in 2002.

Reducing and monitoring pollution caused by routine terminal and tanker operations is the committee’s main focus.

“I consider myself the ‘ordinary citizen’ who can ask perhaps silly questions since my background is not engineering or science,” Jo Ann says. By not focusing on the technical aspects of tanker and terminal operations, this wife, mother, and grandmother brings a down-to-earth, human perspective to issues the committee works on. She may not be able to explain complex chemical test methods or emissions modeling statistics, but she can tell you how air pollution from the tanker terminal or another spill in the Sound might affect her immediate family, all Valdez residents.

Says Jo Ann, “I have the basic knowledge and experience of once living and traveling in unhealthy environments and do not want my grandchildren to share that experience.”

Having grown up in steel mill country in East Chicago, Indiana, Jo Ann saw pollution firsthand. “I remember sitting outside with my mom on the

porch when metallic flakes started to fall from the sky, covering my black slacks. She said it happened everyday around 4 p.m., that it was something the steel mills let off.”

Michigan and South Dakota have also been home to Jo Ann, and she spent two years living and teaching in Kisumu, Kenya. The people there were poor, she says, but extremely kind.

Jo Ann has explored many other parts of the world for work and pleasure, too: Hawaii, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Canada,

Central America, and the Netherlands. Memorable moments include being charged by a bull elephant in Kenya, and landing in Nairobi the same day an airliner hijacking and hostage rescue mission affected that city’s airport. Closer to home, she enjoys playing with her granddaughter and grandson, taking photos, cooking, gardening, and running Chili Bean, her Akita-husky mix. One of her photos made it onto the cover of the town’s phone book several years ago.

Jo Ann’s also an avid reader. “What else would you expect from a reading specialist?” she says with a smile. All

genres interest her, from historical novels, to other types of fiction, to nonfiction.

Teaching developmental education, which includes courses such as college success skills, reading, and fundamental writing, “is the kind of job people dream of in that it is so rewarding when one is being paid to play,” Jo Ann says. “I never considered teaching as work; it is something I have always wanted to do since going home from first grade and retelling *everything* that happened that day to my younger sister.”

Her enthusiasm is backed by education: a bachelor’s degree in elementary education, a master’s in learning disabilities and reading, and post graduate studies in reading. Jo Ann developed the Learning Resource Center for Prince William Sound Community College and is active in various academic testing programs.

College for Jo Ann had its lighter moments, like when her picture was submitted to Playboy magazine by mischievous sorority sisters. Jo Ann thought it was all a joke until she received several calls from the magazine encouraging her to be a bunny.

Now, as a teacher of college students, she’s sure that if there were another oil spill in the Sound, attendance in her classes would dwindle as many students would be lured by high wages of spill response work. Jo Ann hopes that’s a choice they won’t ever have to make.



Jo Ann Benda serves on the Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee.

## New UAA grad takes over front desk in Anchorage

Jessica Cler has joined the council staff as administrative assistant in the Anchorage office.

Cler, a longtime Alaska resident, graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Alaska Anchorage in May. She majored in political science, with minors in environmental studies and French. Before taking the council job, she was an organizer and fundraiser for the Alaska Center for the Environment.

She is a graduate of Colony High School in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, where her family lives. Her hobbies include traveling, reading, politics and, as she puts it, “anything that will take me outside in the summer.”

Cler started work in October. She is replacing Mary Schonberger, who was promoted to project manager assistant.



Jessica Cler

## New and improved pages available on council site

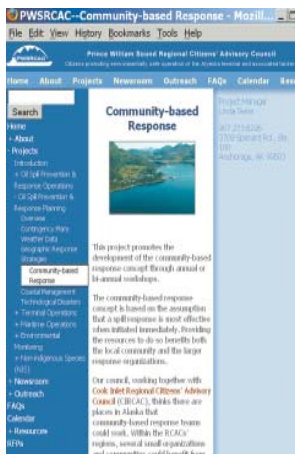
The council’s web site, [www.pwsrcac.org](http://www.pwsrcac.org), is constantly updated. Here is a sampling of new material:

- A new page focuses on a project called Community-based Response. Our council, working together with Cook Inlet Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council, thinks there are places in Alaska that community-based response teams could work. Within the two council regions, several small organizations and communities could benefit from increased networking and shared resources. ([www.pwsrcac.org/projects/OSRplan/cbr.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/projects/OSRplan/cbr.html))

- Another new page features links to news articles either about the council or in which we weigh in on issues of concern. It’s called PWSRCAC in the News. ([www.pwsrcac.org/newsroom/inthenews.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/newsroom/inthenews.html))

- Our photo galleries have also been improved and will be updated with new images frequently. ([www.pwsrcac.org/photogallery/galindex.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/photogallery/galindex.html))

- We’ve also begun posting video clips online. See our home page under the “What’s New” column for one on citizens’ councils and another on the educational video we recently produced that features volunteer, training, and employment opportunities for youth about to enter the work force.



## Marine ops manager leaves

Bill Abbott, manager of the citizens’ council’s Maritime Operations Program, resigned his position as of Dec. 22.

He has taken a job as instructor in the maritime department of the Alaska Vocational Technical Center in Seward.

Abbott, a veteran Alaska mariner, had worked for the council since June 2006.

“We will miss Bill’s good humor and excellent knowledge and background with maritime issues specific to our work,” said John Devens, executive director of the council. “We wish him the best in all his future endeavors.”

Anyone interested in applying for the Maritime Operations Program position should contact Donna Schantz in the council’s Valdez office. She can be reached at [schantz@pwsrcac.org](mailto:schantz@pwsrcac.org) or 907-834-5070.

## Correction:



The Exxon Valdez photo on the cover of the September Observer was reversed horizontally. It should have appeared as shown above. Photo courtesy of Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.

**THE OBSERVER** is a quarterly newsletter published by the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council. Except where noted, Observer articles are written by Stan Jones, director of external affairs. For a free subscription to the Observer, contact a council office in Anchorage or Valdez. Contact information is available on the back page.



From the Executive Director

# Oil industry committed to cutting Valdez air pollution

For years, our council has sought an end to hazardous air pollution from Alyeska Pipeline’s tanker terminal in Valdez. A major step came in the late 1990s with the installation of equipment to capture the huge quantities of hydrocarbon vapors forced out as tankers load oil.

Now, as discussed in the column by Tom Stokes on page 6, Alyeska and the oil companies that own it have committed to a plan that will virtually eliminate air pollution from the last major source at the terminal: the Ballast Water Treatment Facility.

EPA estimates the ballast water plant puts out 206 tons per year of dangerous vapors, including cancer-causing benzene. That’s over eight times EPA’s major source threshold level of 25 tons per year, and it’s why we have long urged an end to these emissions. Alyeska projects its overhaul of the ballast water facility will cut the level to less than five tons per year by 2008. The plan includes these improvements:

- Eliminating one large ballast water tank and burning vapors from two others rather than releasing them to the atmosphere.
- Replacing the Dissolved Air Flotation System, which is open to the atmosphere, with a sealed Induced Gas Flotation System.
- Replacing the open-air Biological Treatment Tanks with a closed system that captures vapors for safe disposal rather than releasing them into the atmosphere.

The companies that own Alyeska and the Valdez tanker terminal laid out their commitments to the plan in letters last fall:

I would like to reiterate the Owners’ commitment to the upgrading and enhancement of the Ballast Water Treatment Facility at the Valdez Marine Terminal. -- Gary Preussing, for ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Unocal, and Koch Alaska.

I would like to reiterate BP’s commitment to the Alyeska plan. -- Al Bolea, for BP

The council’s campaign to reduce emissions from the Valdez terminal to safe levels has been a long and complex one, and here in the Observer we commend Alyeska and its owners for taking this final step to complete the process. We also published advertisements in three Alaska newspapers praising the industry for its commitment to cleaner air.

For our part, we commit to continue working with Alyeska on the design and implementation of these welcome improvements.

- John Devens is executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council.



John Devens

## Better procedures needed in dispersant trials

A new citizens’ council report recommends several improvements to dispersant testing procedures at the federal government’s Oil and Hazardous Materials Simulated Environment Test Tank in New Jersey.

The report is the last of two prepared by council consultants Merv Fingas and Elise Decola after they observed tests at the facility – known as OHMSETT – in February and March of 2006.

OHSMETT, operated by a contractor for the U.S. Minerals Management Service, resembles a huge outdoor swimming pool. It is 667 feet long by 65 feet wide and holds 2.6 million gallons of sea water. In the tests, a traveling bridge sprays oil onto the water followed a few seconds later by the chemical oil-spill dispersant. Researchers attempt to measure effectiveness by visual observation, instrumentation, and recovery of undispersed oil remaining on the water.

Fingas and Decola recommended a series of measures to improve the accuracy of OHMSETT results:

- Use a quantitative method of measuring dispersant effectiveness. At present, the OHMSETT tests do not include what is called a mass balance – an attempt to account for all oil put onto the water. Typically, some of it disperses into the water of the tank, some evaporates into the air, some fails to disperse and remains on the surface, some attaches itself to the walls of the tank or to equipment used in the tests, and some that does disperse resurfaces later. Some of the test procedures – such as herding remaining oil with fire hoses for recovery and measurement – probably cause additional dispersion, according to the report. It recommends finding a way to



Test procedures at the OHMSETT facility fail to account properly for the resurfacing phenomenon, shown here, according to the council’s report. Photo courtesy of Merv Fingas.

recover dispersed oil.

- Use correct analytical procedures. The report faults the OHMSETT researchers for inadequate calibration of test instruments and use of the resulting date. The report also notes there is no measurement of wave energy, a critical factor in the dispersion process.

- Continue to take measurements for at least six hours after the dispersant is applied. In the typical OHMSETT test, measurement ends less than an hour afterward. As a result one of the major problems with dispersant use – resurfacing of the oil in a new slick – is not evaluated in the OHMSETT test.

Fingas and DeCola did note that the 2006 tests appeared to resolve some of the problems identified in previous tests at OHMSETT. Those problems had included applying dispersants to heated oil rather than oil that had been allowed to cool to ambient

air temperature; the use of booms to contain the oil during the tests; and testing dispersants on artificially weathered oil rather than oil that had been allowed to weather naturally, as would occur after an actual spill.

Because of the many questions about the effectiveness of dispersants in cold seawater, as well as their toxicity, the citizens’ council board in May 2006 adopted a position opposing their use in the Exxon Valdez oil spill region until research is conducted that produces conclusive answers to the questions.

The new report, titled “Oil Spill Dispersant Effectiveness Testing in OHMSETT,” is available for download from the council website at [www.pwsrccac.org/projects/EnvMonitor/dispers.html](http://www.pwsrccac.org/projects/EnvMonitor/dispers.html). An earlier report by Fingas and Decola on the 2006 OHMSETT tests is also available on the same page, along with much additional information on dispersants.

## EXXON VALDEZ: No effect shown in dispersant testing

Continued from Page 1

8, the EPA declared that further dispersant applications would “not be effective and therefore would be inappropriate.”

Nevertheless, on Monday, April 10, a new experiment was proposed to drop up to 25,000 gallons on weathered oil. During the following two days, a combination of bad weather, poor visibility, communication problems, and logistical difficulties prevented even a small drop. The last attempt came on April 13, when 5,500 gallons were sprayed on floating oil south of Gore Point. No effect was observed visually, and samples taken by the vessel Baltic Sea revealed no measurable effect. However, a control slick that had not been treated broke up on its own and was gone by the end of the observation time.

Even if the dispersant had worked, it doesn’t appear enough was on hand to matter much. About 22,150 gallons of dispersant were in Alaska and available to Alyeska at the time of the spill. However, the top federal official in the spill response, Coast Guard Commander Steve McCall, estimated it would have taken 500,000 gallons of dispersant to treat the 11 million gallons of oil released by the Exxon Valdez.

Two attempts to burn spilled oil were conducted on the second day of the spill. In the first, an estimated fifteen thousand gallons of crude oil were ignited and burned with high efficiency. But efforts to ignite a second slick the same day proved futile because the oil had emulsified. The strategy was abandoned.

“This review of the history of the Exxon Valdez spill points up why we have always had deep reservations about the use of dispersant,” said John Devens, executive director of the council. “The dispersant stockpiled in Alaska today is the same one that failed completely in the Exxon Valdez spill and we have seen no evidence since then to suggest it will work any better the next time.”

In May 2006 the council adopted a position opposing any use of dispersants in the area affected by the Exxon spill until scientific research demonstrates they will work under the conditions found there.

“We continue to believe the main cleanup effort in an oil spill should rely on proven techniques like booming and skimming,” Devens said.

A copy of Gilson’s report, “On the Non-Mechanical Response for the T/V Exxon Valdez Oil Spill,” can be obtained by request to the council office in Anchorage. See page 8 for contact information.



In early October 2006, rain pelted Prince William Sound for two days, with Valdez receiving some of the worst flooding in the region. These photos show some of the storm’s effects.

The road to the Valdez Marine Terminal was closed temporarily because of flooding, and staffing at the terminal was reduced to the bare minimum due to safety concerns.

Communication outages from the heavy rainfall and severe flooding caused a brief shutdown of the trans-Alaska pipeline.

The Richardson Highway, the only road out of town, became impassable. Boats and planes were the only options for transporting people and supplies. Bridges in the area washed out, and homes and recreational cabins were threatened. Some cabins were completely destroyed, buried under tons of rock and debris from flash flooding.

Several days after the floods, residents were still mopping up and repairing bridges, roads, and other structures damaged in the deluge.

(All photos courtesy of Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. Alyeska expressed its thanks to Pete Mattison and Ross Nease, facility maintenance coordinators who helped lead the organization’s successful flood response.)



# Valdez F



ABOVE: Abercrombie Creek flooded through a Petrostar metering building, across Dayville Road and toward the Petrostar Refinery plant.

LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: The braided Lowe River overflowed its banks.

Debris clogged culverts at the tanker terminal, forcing water over roads.

Several trees fell into the swollen Allison Creek.

BELOW: Alyeska maintenance personnel and contractors removed multiple trees as they fell into Allison Creek. The trees’ weight threatened to destroy a bridge, but removing them helped save the structure.





# Flooding



ABOVE: Road access to Valdez was completely cut off for more than a week due to major road and bridge damage through Keystone Canyon.

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Flood waters scoured the Petrostar metering building, jeopardizing the foundation and exposing utility lines.

Allison Creek flooding was stabilized, and the water routed back into the main channel.

Alyeska maintenance personnel and contractors stabilized the Allison Creek bridge.

Repairs on the Allison Creek bridge began as soon as possible.



Alyeska Viewpoint

Progress report on upgrades to ballast water plant

Tankers arrive each week at the Valdez Marine Terminal to transport crude oil from Prince William Sound to refineries on the West Coast. Upon arrival, some tankers offload ballast water that has been used to control buoyancy. Many of the older style tankers do not have the ability to segregate ballast. In these ships, the ballast becomes contaminated with remnants of oil previously carried in the tanks and must be processed at the terminal’s Ballast Water Treatment Facility. The newest generation of tankers generally keeps the seawater ballast segregated from the oil tanks. The double-hulled tanker configuration required by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 results in dramatically less ballast needing treatment. Therefore, the existing ballast water treatment system is now over-sized for the current and forecasted needs. In addition, Alyeska has set goals to reduce air and water emissions and improve worker safety at the facility. Alyeska has already started to implement its major project to completely renovate the ballast water treatment system.

The process currently involves a three-part treatment that plays off the natural tendency of oil and water to separate. The first step occurs in the 90s “settling” tanks where most of the oil is skimmed off the top. Recovered oil is then transferred to the 80s tanks and clarified water is charged from the 90s tanks to the Dissolved Air Flotation system.

The second step occurs in the dissolved air

flotation chambers where air bubbles are pushed through the water to carry most of the remaining oil to the surface. The oil is then collected and combined with the other recovered crude.

The third step is in the biological treatment tanks where nutrients have been added to support the microbes that eat the water soluble hydrocarbons. The treated water is then discharged into Port Valdez.

The plant was originally designed and is permitted to process 30 million gallons of ballast and storm water per day. Today, we are operating in the 2 to 4 million gallon per day range, and as new tank ships enter the system, the volume of water to be treated will continue to decline.

During 2006, we accomplished a number of steps toward our safety, environmental, and operational goals. We completed the risk analysis identification, evaluation and administrative mitigation controls. We completed the major studies to characterize and quantify the air emissions from the facility and continued to work with the Environmental Protection Agency and the citizens’ council to evaluate these emissions. We implemented several operational changes and project modifications that reduced the plant footprint by about one-third. This reduction provided significant reductions in our air emissions and increased worker safety. We also continued extensive conceptual and design engineering

that included a proof-of-concept vapor line installation; installation of a nitrogen blanket to inert the atmosphere in tank 80; and a pilot test of equipment being considered for use in the renovation.

Moving into 2007, vapor controls will be installed on the ballast

water tanks, up to three pilot plants and studies are being done to assist in evaluation of technologies for use in replacing the current treatment systems. The resulting information is being utilized to move from conceptual to final engineering and subsequent construction and installation. The changes are substantial and will result in a dramatic reduction in air emissions. We are committed to continuing the extensive project engineering and plant modifications to bring the ballast water facility into the future. The updated plant will provide additional protection for our workers and the environment while processing the necessary ballast water as part of the system.

• Tom Stokes is manager, Valdez Marine Terminal.



Tom Stokes

SUIT: Dispute settled

Continued from Page 1

commissioned the study, Alyeska objected to the council’s use of contract funds to pay for Fineberg’s analysis, and requested the council to either arbitrate the matter or take it to the state courts. The council opted for the latter.

The matter never came to trial and was dropped late last year by mutual consent of Alyeska and the council.

“We’re glad to have this issue cleared up,” said John Devens, executive director of the council. “It was a relatively small amount of money that created a major headache in the relationship between us and Alyeska. Both parties have more important things to focus on.”

Council documents available free to the public

Single copies of most documents produced or received by the citizens’ council are available free to the public. To make a request, contact either council office. Addresses appear on the back page of the Observer.

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For more information on the citizens’ council, including the full text of recent Observers, visit our Web site at [www.pwsrac.org](http://www.pwsrac.org).



**SNOWY HARBOR** – Executive Director John Devens and Outreach Coordinator Linda Robinson visited Seldovia in September, as winter began to make itself felt. Photo by Linda Robinson.



# Agency faults ship management in tanker grounding

When the tanker Seabulk Pride broke away from a loading dock at Nikiski early last year and went aground on a nearby beach, it was out of compliance with Coast Guard ice guidelines, according to the agency’s investigation of the incident.

The Coast Guard’s report on the investigation, released in early November, said the vessel was not properly tied to the dock, its engine was not ready for a quick start in case of emergency, and its bridge was not properly manned when fast-moving ice broke its mooring lines and pushed it away from the dock where it was taking on petroleum products from a Tesoro refinery. Before the crew could get the engine started or take other preventive action, the tanker grounded on a beach. The accident began at 5:23 a.m. on Feb. 2, and the ship was aground by 5:36 a.m.

The Coast Guard also described on-scene risk assessment as inadequate. “The only sure course of action that would have prevented this casualty was to require the ship to depart the terminal during the icing conditions experienced,” the agency wrote.

The Coast Guard said it would seek a two-month license suspension for the ship’s master, Stewart Potter, for failure to make sure the vessel’s moorings were strong enough to hold in all expected conditions.

The agency also made several recommendations for avoiding similar incidents in the future. The suggestions included paying more attention to mooring needs and procedures; modifying the dock to fend off moving ice; clearer ice guidelines from the Coast Guard; and more spot checks by the agency to make sure the guidelines are being followed.

The 600-foot Seabulk Pride is a double-hull tanker capable of carrying 342,000 barrels of cargo. At the time of the incident, it was operating under

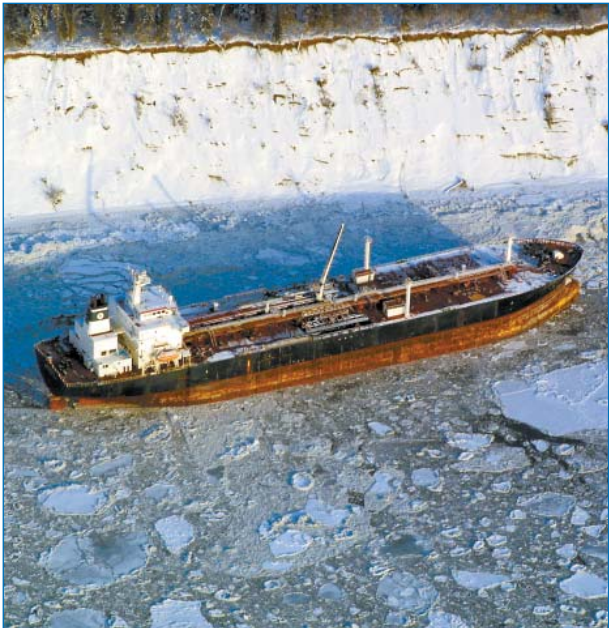
contract to Tesoro and had about 116,000 barrels of refined products on board. About five barrels spilled from the loading equipment when the ship was torn away from the dock.

However, no additional oil spilled as a result of the grounding a few minutes later, despite the fact that the vessel’s outer hull was cracked while it was on the beach. This was widely credited to the vessel’s double-hull design, mandated by the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 in response to the Exxon Valdez spill.

The Nikiski grounding prompted renewed calls for rescue tugs in Cook Inlet by the citizens’ councils for Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound, among others. Though a comprehensive escort system was established in Prince William Sound after the Exxon spill, Cook Inlet is still without tugs, despite repeated calls for them over the years.

The Coast Guard report itself is faulted by some critics. “The Seabulk Pride incident revealed a systemic breakdown in pollution prevention and navigational safeguards in Cook Inlet, and a truly objective third-party review must occur to understand what roles, if any, the Coast Guard, the pilots, and Tesoro played here,” said Bob Shavelson, head of the Homer-based group Cook Inlet Keeper. “Otherwise, we’re stuck with a superficial investigation that fails to answer even the most basic questions surrounding the incident.”

The tanker’s operator, Seabulk International, commissioned its own report on the incident by a London-based engineering firm. That report concluded that ships using the Nikiski dock have “an unacceptably high risk of breakaway” under existing Coast Guard guidelines, according to a statement from the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens’ Advisory



The tanker Seabulk Pride broke its moorings and grounded on a Cook Inlet beach on the morning of Feb. 2 last year. Photo by Tim Robertson.

Council. The report suggested increasing mooring lines, monitoring ice thickness, and using a standby tug as measures to diminish the risks at Nikiski.

Those risks were driven home again on Jan. 9, when the the Seabulk Pride was again hit by heavy ice at the dock. A mooring cable snapped and four others were strained, causing winches to pay out line to relieve the tension, according to press accounts.

No oil was spilled, but the Seabulk Pride cast off and sailed to Kachemak Bay to be inspected for damage, then returned to Nikiski Jan. 11 to finish loading oil, with two tugs standing by.

A week after the January incident, Tesoro Alaska announced plans to bring in a 5,500-horsepower tug to assist oil tankers for the rest of the winter ice season.

Mike Munger, executive director of the Cook Inlet citizens’ council, said the results will be evaluated after the ice season ends, and he hopes the practice becomes permanent. He commended Tesoro for bringing in the tug, which is not required by any agency.

Munger’s group will sponsor an Anchorage forum Feb. 21-22 on navigational safety in Cook Inlet. Visit [www.circac.org/conference.php](http://www.circac.org/conference.php) for information.

## PUGET SOUND: Is citizen oversight program in peril?

Continued from Page 1

recommended improvements by a slight increase in taxes on oil and gasoline in the state.

The Washington council was set up in response to an oil spill in Dalco Passage two years ago, and is modeled to some extent on the Alaska citizens’ councils for Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet.

There are major differences, however. One is that board members are appointed to the Washington council by the state’s governor, rather than being seated by the council itself. Another is that the makeup of the Washington council, by law, includes representatives of the oil industry and other business interests the council is assigned to oversee.

The inherent strains in that structure were evident in the council’s October report, which includes a 25-page minority report by oil and shipping interests.

Representatives of the Western States Petroleum Association opposed a funding increase for the council, complaining that “the current staff and consultant have not demonstrated adequate knowledge or understanding of the issues facing the council. Evidence supporting this fact includes misinformation, bias against industry, and erroneous calculations.”

Mike Moore, who represents the Pacific Merchants Shipping Association on the council board, opposed its creation and wrote in the minority report that his organization does not believe “it is necessary to have separate and independent oversight committees reviewing actions of each state agency and program in perpetuity.”

Mike Cooper, a former firefighter and state legislator who chairs the council board, told the press in Seattle that the oil industry is making a push to kill the council.

As the Observer went to press in late January, it looked as if the industry might get its way. Just before Christmas, Gov. Gregoire proposed legislation to move

the advisory council under the state’s Department of Ecology, which environmentalists fault as being too deferential to the oil industry, according to a report in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

The proposal was immediately denounced by advocates of citizen oversight. One Washington state lawmaker accused Gregoire of wanting to “defang” the council. The Post-Intelligencer editorialized that Gregoire’s proposal “seems a surefire way to shrinkwrap the council into an industry-approved non-entity.”

John Devens, executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council, was interviewed by the Post-Intelligencer for its story on the Washington council. Devens said the Gregoire proposal illustrates one of the main points the Prince William Sound council has always made about effective citizen oversight: “If it’s under the control of a governmental agency or a political figure, they’re not truly independent.”

Gregoire said the move would “help ensure an efficient and effective governance model.”

The Washington advisory council’s web site is [www.governor.wa.gov/osac](http://www.governor.wa.gov/osac). The report can be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat format at this link: [www.governor.wa.gov/osac/report/finalreport.pdf](http://www.governor.wa.gov/osac/report/finalreport.pdf)

## Legislative panel is formed

The council’s Legislative Affairs Committee for 2007 has been formed. The committee of five members of the council board monitors developments in Juneau during the legislative session, providing reports and advice to the full council as needed.

Steve Lewis of Seldovia and Blake Johnson of Kenai are chair and co-chair, respectively. The other members are: Patience Andersen Faulkner, Bill Schoephoester, and Walt Parker.

The committee is supported by the council’s legislative monitor, Juneau attorney Douglas Mertz.

## No news is good news



Katie Evanoff (front) and Destiny Vlasoff were among the students who helped with the council’s green crab monitoring project during a September trip to Tatitlek by Project Manager Dan Gilson. So far, the trapping has turned up no evidence of the harmful invasive species in Prince William Sound. Photo by Dan Gilson.



Community Corner

Video focuses on career options in fields of seafaring, marine sciences

I want to begin this column by wishing a very happy 2007 to all of our extraordinary volunteers, and to all of our Observer readers.

I'm pleased to say the year begins with two new tools I'll use while visiting the region's communities. The first is "Where Do I Go From Here," a half-hour video aimed primarily at high-school students. It focuses on career opportunities in the fields of marine sciences and seafaring. We hope it will encourage students to look into careers that will allow them to remain in, or return to, their home communities. Some of these careers require college, and some require vocational training in the field of the students' interest.

At the invitation of board member Jane Eisemann, staff member Jessica Cler and I visited high school classes in Kodiak on December 11 and presented the video to over 90 students. It was well received and, I hope, provided food for thought to the students. If you would like a presentation of this video for students in your local school, please let me know. Copies are available on DVD at no cost to you from our Anchorage office.

The second new tool is the fourth edition of the Prince William Sound coloring book, which has just been published. There are more student drawings than in the past and a couple of new adult artists are featured as well. Contact us if you need any of these books. We will continue to collect new artwork in hopes of publishing a new edition next year. You can download all of the drawings from our website at [www.pwsrcac.org/outreach/index.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/outreach/index.html).

September community activities started with a public reception held at the Alaska Islands and Ocean Center in Homer. We had a great turnout, and, if you haven't had the opportunity to visit the center, it's

well worth the stop. It houses the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve and the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, as well as a public information center with displays depicting wildlife of the region.

In September, Executive Director John Devens and I visited Seldovia. Director Steve Lewis' wife, Savannah, and I visited with students to talk about oil: what it is, how it's found, how it's transported, what's made from it, and what happens if it's spilled.

We hope to put together a more permanent traveling information display on this topic to use in classrooms.

John Devens gave a presentation to the Seldovia City Council and commended Steve Lewis for the job he's doing for the council.

The booth was set up at three events in the fall: the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce convention and trade show in Anchorage; the Society for Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry's 27th annual meeting in Montreal; and the Pacific Marine Expo in Seattle. Volunteers Roger Green and John French assisted staff member Tom Kuckertz and me at the Montreal meeting, and Director Blake Johnson worked the booth at Pacific Marine Expo with staff members John Devens, Lisa Ka'aihue and me. Consultant Bill Driskell also pitched in.

Upcoming Events

Upcoming events include the Alaska Forum on the Environment, February 12-16 in Anchorage. The council is assisting the forum with its first film festival as part of the week's events. Films will be shown February 12-14 on topics such as climate change, invasive species, emergency response, fish and wildlife populations, rural issues, energy resources and conservation. For more information, visit [www.akforum.com](http://www.akforum.com).



Linda Robinson



Outreach Coordinator Linda Robinson talks to students about the council's work during a September visit to Seldovia. Photo by Savannah Lewis.

Prince William Sound  
Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is an independent, non-profit corporation formed after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill to minimize the environmental impacts of the trans-Alaska pipeline terminal and tanker fleet.

The council has 18 member organizations, including communities affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill and groups representing Alaska Native, aquaculture, environmental, commercial fishing, recreation and tourism interests in the spill region.

The council is certified under the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 as the citizen advisory group for Prince William Sound, and operates under a contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. The contract, which is in effect as long as oil flows through the pipeline, guarantees the council's independence, provides annual funding, and ensures the council the same access to terminal facilities as state and federal regulatory agencies.

*The council's mission: Citizens promoting environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.*

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3709 Spenard Road, Suite 100	Box 3089 / 130 S. Meals, Suite 202
Anchorage AK 99503	Valdez AK 99686
Phone: 907-277-7222	Phone: 907-834-5000
Toll-free: 800-478-7221	Toll-free: 877-478-7221
Fax: 907-277-4523	Fax: 907-835-5926

Internet: [www.pwsrcac.org](http://www.pwsrcac.org)  
Email: [anch@pwsrcac.org](mailto:anch@pwsrcac.org)