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PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND RCAC

Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

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Systems at fault in April Valdez Terminal spill identified

On April 12, a sheen was reported near the small boat harbor at the Valdez Marine Terminal. Investigations identified the source as a sump which overflowed. The primary causes of the spill have been identified as the failure of a check valve and a level indicator.

The check valve became clogged with debris.

A level indicator was not functioning. This failure also kept the high-level alarm from activating.

While the level indicator should have prevented the incident, human error also played a factor. A technician conducting rounds did not verify the sump level due to a headlamp failure. This action had the potential to prevent or reduce the volume of the spill.

What happened?

When the systems are working properly, rainwater from the nearby area drains into the sump, which is then pumped into the terminal's industrial wastewater system. That wastewater system empties into the ballast water treatment system.

The investigation showed that the check valve became clogged with debris at an unknown point and was unable to fully close. This allowed oily water from the ballast water facility's pipes to flow into the sump.

The level indicator in the sump was supposed to sense rising liquids and automatically turn on the sump's pump when the liquid level reached a certain height,

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In this May photo, several layers of oil spill boom can be seen in place around the Valdez Marine Terminal's small boat harbor. This is where the sheen of spilled oil was first discovered in April. Photo courtesy of Alyeska.

Cover and header photos by Cathy Hart.

Technology study demonstrates importance of the Council's independent research

A new study evaluating methods of establishing a tow line between an escort tug and a tanker in distress is a prime example of why the Council's studies are vital.

The Council often hires experts to review equipment technology used in the Prince William Sound oil transportation industry. Sometimes these studies fill a hole or gap where independent research is lacking.

"Very little has been previously written on this topic," said Alan Sorum, who managed this project and other similar technology reviews for the Council. "In a literature review it conducted, the Council's contractor, Glosten, found that there is a general lack of published material on this subject and in particular, little guidance on best use practices or what is the most appropriate device to use for a given situation."

The study looked at a specific piece of equipment called a "messenger line." Passing a messenger line is the first step in setting up a tow line between a tug and a tanker in distress. The lighter weight messenger line helps responders connect the heavy tow lines.

Retrieving a messenger line can be difficult and dangerous in the rough weather often encountered in Prince William Sound. Depending on the vessel and the technology on board, they may be passed by hand, heaved or thrown aboard, projected by mechanical means, or picked out of the water.

Tough equipment required for Alaska's harsh climate

Alaska has a state law that requires tankers to carry specially designed towing equipment when traveling through Prince William Sound. This equipment includes a towing wire, floating line and buoy, and a heavy-duty shackle.

These components are all specifically sized to match

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In this 2016 photo, a U.S. Coast Guard officer fires a line from one military vessel to another. This is one method of connecting the messenger line between a tug and a tanker. Photo by Pasquale Sena, U.S. Coast Guard.

Council elects Board officers to serve through May 2021

The Council held its annual Board meeting by videoconference on May 7-8, 2020. Among other business, the Board elected officers who will serve from May 2020 to May 2021. All current officers were re-elected into the same positions they held for the previous year.

The elected executive committee is comprised of:

- President: Robert Archibald, representing the City of Homer
- Vice President: Amanda Bauer, representing the City of Valdez
- Treasurer: Wayne Donaldson, representing the City of Kodiak
- Secretary: Bob Shavelson, representing the Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition
- Three Members-at-Large:
  - Ben Cutrell, representing Chugach Alaska Corporation
  - Thane Miller, representing Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation
  - Rebecca Skinner, representing the Kodiak Island Borough

The Council is very happy to have the support of its many volunteers from all over the Exxon Valdez oil spill region.

The new executive committee is an excellent representation of the Council.

Robert Archibald
City of Homer

Amanda Bauer
City of Valdez

Bob Shavelson
Oil Spill Region
Environmental Coalition

Wayne Donaldson
City of Kodiak

Ben Cutrell
Chugach Alaska
Corporation

Thane Miller
Prince William Sound
Aquaculture Corporation

Rebecca Skinner
Kodiak Island
Borough

Meet the officers:
www.bit.ly/ExecCommittee2020

From the executive director:

EPA's temporary policy limits inspections and enforcement actions

In March, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a temporary policy on how to handle enforcement and compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. An April letter clarified that the policy was not intended to absolve companies of responsibility, but to allow flexibility for regulators to adapt to the unique situations presented by the pandemic.

The EPA published remarks from public officials and stakeholders in support of the temporary policy, including remarks from Jason Brune, the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, or ADEC. The commissioner's remarks are concerning, especially the reference to regulatory bodies, including ADEC and other state and federal agencies, seeking out "gotcha" moments in the course of their duty to enforce safety requirements.

In an April 24 letter to ADEC, the Council requested a commitment that all reasonable actions to prevent accidents from occurring would be taken. The Council also requested that any temporary policies such as this one be lifted as soon as the emergency declaration has ended.

Inspections are not 'gotcha' moments

The Council does not believe that regulatory oversight, including monitoring, inspecting, and reporting on industry operations, are punitive 'gotcha' moments. We also do not think that regulatory bodies seek to unnecessarily penalize industry during normal circumstances, let alone during an emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the extreme stresses resulting from this crisis, careful consideration should be given to how issues are characterized. The Council recognizes that regulators' discretion is necessary during these unprecedented times, however regulatory enforcement must continue, as clarified by the EPA in April.

As state and federal agencies are stretched to their maximum capabilities, the Council's role becomes increasingly more important. These new limits on inspections are added to the many stressors already impacting the system in Prince William Sound, such as complications related to the pandemic, the recent oil spill from the Valdez Marine Terminal, the low price of oil, and reduced budgets and staffing levels, all of which could result in diminished safeguards for oil spill prevention and response. The suggestion that the department is limiting inspections can lead to complacency for both industry and regulatory agencies, transferring the risk to the public, and increasing the possibility of a major oil spill.

Donna Schantz
Executive Director

The safety of personnel must be the first priority. However, regulatory agencies cannot back off from their oil spill prevention responsibilities at this critical time in Alaska's history.

> ***"The regulated community needs certainty that it will not fall prey to punitive 'gotcha' moments during this pandemic. Limiting inspections at this time is prudent as we do not want staff to be unintentional vectors for the virus to rural parts of our state that are ill-prepared to treat sick patients."***
>
> ***-Jason Brune***
> ***Commissioner, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation***

Quote source: www.bit.ly/CommissionerQuote
ADEC guidance: www.bit.ly/ADECcovid

From Alyeska:

Alyeska wins United States Coast Guard award for environmental excellence

The United States Coast Guard has announced that Alyeska earned a gold-level William A. Benkert Award for Environmental Excellence. This is the premiere award presented by the Coast Guard that honors members of the marine industry for excellence in areas of marine safety and environmental protection.

The program notes, "Gold level recipients have expended extraordinary effort into protecting the environment and it shows. This biennial award recognizes organizations for outstanding achievements in all aspects of marine environment protection."

The award specifically reviewed Alyeska's marine safety and environmental performance between 2018-2019 and included highlights such as the marine services transition, the organization's safety culture and performance, environmental monitoring, community partnerships, and philanthropy programs. Though the nomination was focused on the Valdez Marine Terminal and Prince William Sound, work around TAPS – like the 2019 Minton Creek exercise and Alyeska's ongoing work with University Alaska Fairbanks on unmanned aerial vehicles – was also recognized.

"Since joining Alyeska, I've seen a resolute commitment to environmental stewardship around the TAPS," said Alyeska President Brigham McCown. "I know that the support from communities and organizations like the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is invaluable. The water quality monitoring performed by PWSRCAC serves as important validation of our progress."

The Benkert Award was created to recognize outstanding achievements in marine environmental protection that go beyond mere compliance with industrial and regulatory standards. It is intended to be a creative exchange of ideas and innovations to everyone's benefit. It serves as a map for assessing environmental management strengths and weaknesses while stressing a continual improvement.

This environmental award is named for Rear Admiral William M. Benkert (1923-1989), who served at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, DC as Chief of the Office of Marine Environment and Systems from 1972 until 1974, and as Chief of the Office of Merchant Marine Safety from 1974 until 1978. He is fondly remembered as the father of the Coast Guard's Marine Environmental Protection Program.

Two escort tugs assist a tanker at the Valdez Marine Terminal's oil loading docks. Photo courtesy Alyeska Corporate Communications.

Peer listeners build community resilience

By Betsi Oliver
Outreach Coordinator

After the Exxon Valdez oil spill, a Council project assessed the social impacts of the spill and developed resources that could be used by small communities to help with healing. An oil spill has complex and long-lasting impacts on the social and emotional health of a community, more than a natural disaster. Substance abuse, domestic violence, self-isolation, and suicide all increase as a result of stress that can be felt throughout a community. Activities that strengthen community connectedness help counteract these effects.

Mental health professionals today are making comparisons between the ongoing mental health impacts of disasters such as the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and those of COVID-19. Many of the elements that make an oil spill so challenging can also be applied to the current COVID-19 crisis, in particular the high levels of uncertainty about when the crisis will end, how long recovery will take, and whether individuals are doing the right thing in response. Like an oil spill, the pandemic will have long-lasting impacts on individual physical health, the economy, and communities' social fabric. All of this has a cumulative impact on mental health.

Betsi Oliver

After the Exxon Valdez oil spill, many people needed a friendly ear to listen to their struggles and stories with empathy. The Council sponsored creation of the Peer Listener Training, which empowers residents in our region to support each other through effective listening. In a disaster, mental health professionals are swamped and costly. In small communities, like many rural villages in Alaska, professional support may not be readily available. A neighbor who shares your culture, lifestyle, and experience may be more approachable than a professional counselor, especially for those who may not have a positive view of mental health counseling.

Trained peer listeners, unlike therapists or counselors,

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Peer listening program updated for COVID-19

The Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium has released a new version of Peer Listener Training. The program, initially developed by the Council to support communities after oil spills, is now updated for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sea Grant says, "The current COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way we work and recreate. These changes have caused increased levels of stress, isolation and anxiety. During disasters, those most affected are often reluctant to use traditional mental health services… This updated training helps people learn to use listening skills to support members of their communities and serve as bridges between individuals dealing with the pandemic and formal mental health services."

It takes three hours to watch the two training videos. An accompanying manual provides more detail on each topic, such as language to use when responding to others' strong emotions and examples of effective questions to ask.

Find links and more information on our website: www.bit.ly/PeerListening

Peer listening builds resilience

Continued from page 6

do not give advice and are not experts. Instead they actively listen and help their peers vent strong emotions, feel heard, and have their experiences normalized. A peer listener is connected to resources in the community and knows when to make referrals to professionals or other support systems.

The Council offers a "train the trainer" event every few years to individuals who are positioned to bring the training home to their community. Trained peer listeners increase the resilience of the Exxon Valdez oil spill region should another disaster threaten the fabric of life so deeply. One of the primary takeaways is that even a regular citizen, someone who is not a mental health expert, can make a big difference in their community. Checking in on neighbors, asking intentional questions about well-being, and listening with empathy make a big difference for connectedness and healing. These lessons apply broadly, to all disasters that impact our communities.

Above: Participants in the Council's 2016 training practice peer listening skills. First developed to help Alaskans cope with the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the program has been modified to help victims of hurricanes and now the 2020 pandemic. Photo by Claire Nicholls.

Technology study demonstrates importance of the Council's independent research

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the weight of the vessel and be able to handle the high winds and seas often encountered in Prince William Sound.

Having this specialized equipment on hand allows rescue tugs to quickly and safely help move a stricken tanker to a safer location.

Conducting the study

Researchers reviewed what devices are commercially available for deploying messenger lines. Next, they developed criteria to evaluate the equipment according to: effectiveness, feasibility, transferability, compatibility, age and condition, availability, environmental impacts, and cost.

These eight criteria were based on another Alaska law, which requires industry to use "best available technology." This requirement is intended to ensure that equipment meets and is maintained to a high standard.

The equipment options were each assessed and scored.

How will the Council use this information?

The Council's influence depends on quality, accurate research. The Council uses reports like this to help make sure advice given to industry and government officials is well-informed and supported by the best science available. The findings of this latest research effort are being shared with equipment manufacturers, the oil transportation and shipping industries, and regulators.

Report available online

Read more about the researcher's recommendations on the Council's website:

www.bit.ly/MessengerLines

Systems at fault in April spill identified

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to pump out the excess liquids. Because that level indicator failed, the rising oil and water mix overflowed the sump.

Discovery, containment, and cleanup

The sump was identified as the source of the spill within a few days, however the pathway the oily water took from the sump to the water took time and extensive excavation to discover.

When the systems failed, the oily water seeped through the soils around the sump and entered an old drainpipe, which directed the spill into Port Valdez. The pipe had been installed before the terminal was built to prepare the site for its construction. It was later buried and forgotten until Alyeska discovered it while investigating the spill's path.

Oil continued to seep into Port Valdez until the end of April as oil already in the ground worked its way to water. In early May, a temporary pipeline was completed, which captures the seeping oil and redirects it to the ballast water treatment facility. No more oil is reaching water, however cleanup on land is expected to continue through the fall.

What is the ballast water treatment system?

Unladen oil tankers need to carry seawater on board to improve tanker stability in rough seas. This "ballast water" is sometimes carried in empty cargo tanks, if weather is particularly bad. Ballast water carried in a cargo tank requires shore-side processing to remove residual oil that mixed with the water. Photo by Tom Kuckertz.

The spill and subsequent cleanup activities did not impact the tanker loading berths and oil shipping continued throughout the incident response.

All responders have been required to adhere to safety guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Council staff and volunteers continue to monitor the situation from a safe distance.

Communications with Council

"While preventing oil from reaching the water is always the ultimate goal, Alyeska was proactive and responded to this incident with trained personnel and pre-contracted fishing vessels who were successful in mitigating impacts to the environment," said Donna Schantz, executive director for the Council.

> "This was a great example of how we were designed to work together."
>
> -Donna Schantz
> Executive Director

"Additionally, the Unified Command, including Alyeska as the responsible party, provided us with information and included us in meetings and updates," she added.

"This was a great example of how we were designed to work together."

Investigation complete

Alyeska's investigation into the cause of the spill was completed in early July. The Council has received information regarding the investigation from Alyeska, including information about the causes and other contributing factors, and will be following up on next steps. Many sumps like this are located throughout the terminal and the Council is interested in Alyeska's measures to prevent this type of occurrence in the future.

April spill:

Crude oil spilled
1421 gallons (34 barrels)

Crude oil recovered
1092 gallons (26 barrels)

Feet of oil spill boom deployed
26,000 (almost 5 miles)

Spill response personnel
240+

Fishing vessels and trained crews
19

Above: Council staff member Austin Love collects water samples near the terminal after the April spill. Photo courtesy of Alyeska.

Above: Crews tend boom around the Solomon Gulch Hatchery, about 2 miles from the terminal. Early in the spill response, Alyeska deployed this protective boom around the hatchery and nearby Valdez Duck Flats. No oil reached either site. Both sites are particularly sensitive to oil contamination. Sensitive areas like these are identified before a spill occurs and response plans are tailored to each site. These plans save time during the critical first hours of a response. Photo by Jeremy Robida.

Now hiring: Accounting Technician

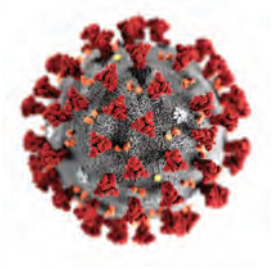
The Council is now hiring for a full-time accounting technician. This position is principally responsible for accounts payable processing, contract records administration, travel and other financial records management, general ledger reconciliations, and other duties as assigned. Located in Anchorage.

More information:

www.bit.ly/PWSRCAC_AccountingTech

COVID-19 updates

Both Council offices (Anchorage and Valdez) remain temporarily closed to the public as a safety precaution due to COVID-19.



Council staff are still conducting business, and are performing key job functions remotely.

All committee meetings are being held via video and teleconference.

The health and safety of Council staff and volunteers are our top priority and will drive decisions as the situation evolves and more information becomes available.

More information and updates available on our website:

www.bit.ly/PWSRCACcovid19

September meeting to be held online

The Council meets three times annually. Usually, the January meeting is held in Anchorage, May in Valdez, and the September meeting is rotated among member communities affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

This year, due to COVID-19, the September meeting will be held online.

Board meetings are open to the public and an opportunity for public comments is provided at the beginning of each meeting.

Upcoming meetings:

- September 17 & 18, 2020 virtual meeting
- January 28 & 29, 2021 in Anchorage, Alaska
- May 6 and 7, 2021 in Valdez, Alaska
- September 16 and 17 in Seward, Alaska

More details are available on our website:

www.pwsrcac.org

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Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

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

Who we are

The 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 System's terminal and tanker fleet.

The Council is a voice for the people, communities, and interest groups in the region oiled by the Exxon Valdez spill.

Those with the most to lose from oil pollution must have a voice in the decisions that can put their livelihoods and communities at risk.

The Council's role

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.

We combat the complacency that led to the 1989 spill by fostering partnerships among the oil industry, government, and local communities in addressing environmental concerns.

Board of Directors

The Council's 18 member entities are communities and interest groups affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill:
Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
Community of Chenega
Chugach Alaska Corporation
City of Cordova
City of Homer
City of Kodiak
City of Seldovia
City of Seward
City of Valdez
City of Whittier
Cordova District Fishermen United
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Kodiak Island Borough
Kodiak Village Mayors Association
Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition
Port Graham Corporation
Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp.
Community of Tatitlek

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Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

Our research

The Council's advice depends on quality research and accurate science about oil transportation safety and the environmental impacts of the Valdez Marine Terminal and tankers, as well as local knowledge and expertise.

The Council regularly retains experts in various fields to conduct independent research on issues related to oil transportation safety and performs a variety of functions aimed at reducing pollution from crude oil transportation activities in and through Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska.

Advisory Committees

While the strategic direction of the Council's work is set by the Board, much of the Council's work is done through permanent volunteer committees made up of Board members, technical experts, and local citizens with an interest in making oil transportation safer in Alaska.

These standing committees work with staff on projects, study and deliberate current oil transportation issues, and formulate their own advice and recommendations to the Council's Board of Directors.

Our committees provide an avenue for public participation in the Council's work.

Terminal Operations & Environmental Monitoring:

The Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee identifies actual and potential sources of episodic and chronic pollution at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems:

The Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems Committee monitors port and tanker operations in Prince William Sound. The committee identifies and recommends improvements in the vessel traffic navigation systems and monitors the vessel escort system.

Scientific Advisory:

The Scientific Advisory Committee sponsors independent scientific research and provides scientific assistance and advice to the other council committees on technical reports, scientific methodology, data interpretation, and position papers.

Oil Spill Prevention and Response:

The Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee works to minimize the risks and impacts associated with oil transportation by reviewing and recommending strong spill prevention and response measures, adequate contingency planning, and effective regulations.

Information and Education:

The Information and Education Committee supports the Council's mission by fostering public awareness, responsibility, and participation in the Council's activities through information and education.

A voice for citizens: www.pwsrcac.org