



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

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Head of citizens' group lauds U.S. House passage of Coast Guard bill that will preserve Prince William Sound tanker escorts

Steve Lewis, president of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, today praised Congressmen Don Young, R-Alaska, and James Oberstar, D-Minn., for their work in securing passage of U.S. House legislation to preserve the tug escort system for loaded oil tankers in the Sound.

Oberstar is chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which added the Prince William Sound provision to the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010 at Young's request.

"Congressman Young and Chairman Oberstar deserve great credit and appreciation by all of the communities of Prince William Sound and the entire Exxon Valdez oil spill region for their work on this issue," Lewis said.

In a statement released after the bill's passage, Young emphasized the importance of the double-escort requirement.

"This will allow for greater redundancy in a place where severe weather and human error can lead to disaster," Young said. "Twenty years ago, the state of Alaska suffered the worst tragedy of its history during the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. We are still learning from the mistakes of that disaster and this bill works toward a safer and better future for our waterways."

With the measure having been approved by the House, it now goes to the Senate. The language approved by the House on Oct. 23 is the same as that in Senate Bill 1041, co-sponsored by Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich in May. The two senators are seeking to have the language included in the Senate version of the Coast Guard bill also.

"We are encouraged by the work of our Alaska Congressional delegation in helping to protect the marine and other natural resources of Prince William Sound, as well as the those of the rest of the oil-spill region from another disastrous oil spill," Lewis said.

The citizens' council has made the drive to secure legislation to preserve the escort system a centerpiece of its work for 2009, the 20th-anniversary year of the Exxon

Valdez oil spill. Under a federal law passed soon after the spill, escort tugs are required for loaded single-hull tankers in Prince William Sound. The same law bans single-hulled tankers after 2015.

For now, the practice in Prince William Sound is to escort all tankers, regardless of hull configuration. The council is concerned this could change with the fleet switching to all double-hulled vessels. This is what prompted the effort to maintain the status quo by extending the requirement to double-hulled tankers.

While double hulls on a tanker can reduce the size of some spills and prevent others, the design feature is not a cure-all. A Coast Guard study after the single-hulled Exxon Valdez's grounding on Bligh Reef concluded a double hull on the tanker could have cut the 11-million-gallon spill by as much as 60 percent. But that would still have left 4.4 million gallons of North Slope crude in Prince William Sound, which would still have constituted a catastrophic accident.

"The escort system is still a crucial component of the safety system created in Prince William Sound after the Exxon Valdez," Lewis said. "It's vital that it be preserved, and we at the council urge the other members of the Senate to join Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich in bringing that about."

Lewis also praised other House lawmakers who helped incorporate the escorts provision in the Coast Guard bill: Rep. John Mica, ranking Republican on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; Rep. Elijah Cummings, chair of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee; and Rep. Frank LoBiondo, ranking Republican on the subcommittee.

Steve Lewis is president of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, where he represents the city of Seldovia on the board. The council 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 18 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.

If you received this news release by fax, you can obtain an electronic copy by emailing a request to jones@pwsrca.org. A high-quality digital photograph of Steve Lewis is also available by email request.◊