

## **Report: Government unprepared for responding to oil spills**

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**JUNEAU, Alaska** — An independent study of a freight vessel that ran aground last year in the Aleutian Islands, spilling thousands of gallons of fuel, is calling on state and federal authorities to beef up spill response and prevention technology.

The report funded by the Alaska Oceans Program, a conservation group in Anchorage, says the state and federal government must put in place in the Aleutians more rescue tugboats and a satellite system to track the location of ships.

The Selendang Ayu, a 738-foot Malaysian-flagged freighter carrying 66,000 tons of soybeans from Washington state to Xiamen, China, ran aground on the west side of Unalaska Island in December 2004.

The vessel owned by the Singapore-based IMC Group, broke in half, spilling more than 335,000 gallons of fuel in the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. The incident resulted in the death of six crew members.

The fuel spill killed more than 1,600 birds and half a dozen sea otters.

The report, conducted by the Anchorage consulting firm of Parker Associates Inc., says there are currently "no public or private towing vessels in the Aleutians that could provide effective rescue towing of ships the size of the Selendang Ayu during storms and virtually all of the limited spill response assets in the region are designed for use in calm, low-current inland waters."

The report also recommends more funding for the federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, which was created in 1991 to help pay the cleanup costs of oil spills. The Selendang Ayu spill already has cost more than \$49 million, according to the report. The liability limit for IMC Group is about \$24 million, the report said.

Rick Steiner, a conservation biology professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage, said he believes the report proves that many safety concerns still exist in the North Pacific cargo route and that spill response techniques must be improved.

He said the satellite tracking system and more tug boats could save lives and curb expensive spills. The Coast Guard has installed a tracking system that can locate ships about 60 or 70 miles out, but Steiner said it would not have gone far enough to track the position of the Selendang Ayu last December.

Gary Folley, a state spill response coordinator, said he has not read the entire report but said he's already found inaccuracies.

The report states that containment boom used to hold the leaking fuel was ineffective due to "late arrival of the boom" and "ineffective boom configurations."

Folley said even the largest booms would not have been able to contain the spill in the rough seas around the Aleutians.

Larry Dietrick, state director for the Division of Spill Prevention and Response, said the Coast Guard has completed the first phase of a risk assessment study, quantifying and characterizing traffic in the Aleutians. He said the second part of the study will identify risks and propose a course of action to prevent future accidents.

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