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**Environmental
Conservation**



U.S. Department of
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**United States
Coast Guard**



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News Release

Coast Guard, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation move forward with Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Representatives of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Coast Guard, and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) formed the management team for a comprehensive assessment of the risk of vessel accidents and spills in the Aleutian Islands in early November.

The management team has been assembled and will conduct its work in accordance with the recommendations of a scoping report on the risk assessment project issued by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the National Academies.

Risk assessment is a systematic approach used to evaluate the level of safety of a complex system and to identify appropriate safety improvements. It is an established engineering discipline that has been used in many industrial sectors, including the maritime industry.

"We are committed to this process and its ultimate goal," said Cmdr. James Robertson, Coast Guard District Seventeen. "This is the best approach to determine what steps can be responsibly taken to mitigate the potential for future marine incidents along the Aleutian Archipelago and protect the resources that exist there."

Both ADEC and the Coast Guard have had experience with maritime risk assessments, and both understand the complexity of the problem at hand, as well as the need for a well-designed process that would ensure a successful outcome. Consequently, they asked the TRB to develop a scientifically rigorous framework for the comprehensive risk assessment and to design the assessment with a logical sequence of building blocks so that it could be conducted in discrete steps. This effort culminated with the TRB's issuance of a report titled "Risk of Vessel Accidents and Spills in the Aleutian Islands: Designing a Comprehensive Risk Assessment (Special Report 293), which can be found online at the following link: <http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/sr/sr293.pdf>.

As set forth in the TRB report, the risk assessment will be conducted with the input of four groups: a Management Team, an Advisory Panel, a Risk Analysis Team, and a Peer Review Panel. In addition to the Coast Guard and the ADEC, the management team for the project includes NFWF, a federally-chartered nonprofit organization dedicated to conservation management. Among other functions, NFWF will serve as the administrator of funds that have been designated to pay for the risk assessment pursuant to the terms of a federal court plea agreement, discussed further below.

A priority for the management team is the establishment of the advisory panel of stakeholders and the appointment of a facilitator for the panel, both as contemplated by the TRB report. The advisory panel will represent a structured stakeholder/participatory approach intended to build trust, clarify the values and goals that should inform the assessment, incorporate local information and knowledge that could otherwise be missed, and potentially provide a path to organizational learning and policy change that might not otherwise be available. The panel will consist of stakeholders and experts who can offer local knowledge and expertise on all issues pertinent to the assessment, such as local infrastructure, relevant industries, waterways and their navigation, weather, and habitats. The facilitator will assist in the management of the stakeholder elicitation process and ensure that all available information emerges, that participants are fairly heard, and that individual views are not unduly suppressed within the panel.

Persons interested in being considered for the advisory panel should watch for future announcements soliciting interest. A Request for Proposals from individuals and firms interested in serving as facilitator for the advisory panel is now

being prepared by the management team and will be disseminated shortly.

Background:

In December 2004, the grounding and breakup of the bulk carrier Selendang Ayu during a severe storm focused public attention on the oil spill risks posed by vessels transiting the Aleutians. The accident caused the death of six crew members when a Coast Guard HH-60 Jayhawk rescue helicopter crashed. It also resulted in a spill of 336,000 gallons of heavy fuel oil near the shores of Unalaska Island. While this incident was particularly severe, other accidents, spills, and near misses have taken place and continue to occur in the region.

A federal court settlement following the Selendang Ayu grounding specified that certain community service funds paid by the defendant in that case be allocated to pay for a comprehensive risk assessment of ship accidents and spills in the Aleutians and for the conduct of projects identified to minimize those risks.

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