

Web posted Monday, August 29, 2005

Safety program could get boost from state grant

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Peninsula Clarion

Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council is in line for \$280,000 state grant meant to continue its multifaceted Cook Inlet marine transportation and oil facility operation safety program.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly will hold a public hearing at its meeting Tuesday on Ordinance 2005-19-17, accepting the grant and authorizing a sole-source contract with CIRCAC to further the safety effort.

State law authorizes the borough to contain, clean up or prevent releases of hazardous substances. CIRCAC is recognized as the only local entity with the expertise to develop and implement such a safety program for Cook Inlet traffic.

Mike Munger, CIRCAC's executive director, said the ongoing safety program is not something new, but the \$280,000 shot in the arm will go a long way toward funding its various projects. He credited the work of the peninsula's legislative contingent with seeing the funding made it into the state spending package.

The state money, which comes through the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, was written into Senate Bill 46 during the last legislative session and signed into law by Gov. Frank Murkowski in June.

According to the ordinance document, the funding could pay for, but would not be limited to, nontank vessel contingency plan reviews, shore-zone mapping programs, intertidal and subtidal habitat monitoring, pipeline integrity assessments and public outreach programs.

Oil producers, refiners and transporters in Cook Inlet provide the bulk of the funding supporting CIRCAC programs. That funding level is negotiated every three years and currently stands at \$800,000 annually, Munger said. The state grant will supplement the industry funding. A committee process will determine exactly how it is to be used within CIRCAC.

The money is passed through the borough because the state cannot allocate funding directly to CIRCAC, Munger said.

The borough had originally requested \$350,000, but Munger said CIRCAC was grateful to be receiving \$280,000.

The regional advisory council, created by federal law in the wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, carries out several ongoing programs that include environmental monitoring, spill prevention and response and physical oceanography that, among other things, gathers data about circulation patterns in Cook Inlet. CIRCAC also conducts studies to learn where oil industry contaminants end up and what their impacts may be,

does contingency planning, risk assessment and regulation permit monitoring and review.

CIRCAC's sister agency, the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, which was created first, conducts similar efforts in Prince William Sound.