

ENVIRONMENT & SAFETY

Ninth ice camera planned for Cook Inlet Petroleum News

The Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council is planning another expansion of its ice camera network.

The Kenai-based, congressionally mandated organization promotes safe oil tanker and other industry operations in Cook Inlet.

The council has a network of eight high-resolution digital cameras mounted around the inlet in locations where drifting winter ice floes pose a serious hazard for vessels. Two of these cameras were installed in 2013 on Cook Inlet Energy's Osprey off-shore platform and Hilcorp's Granite Point platform.

Now the council is making plans to install its ninth camera, working with partners including the city of Kenai.

"This camera will be on city property and aimed at the mouth of the Kenai River to monitor freshwater ice forming there that poses a greater risk to mariners because of its density," the council said in its April newsletter. "When this freshwater ice is transported on a flood tide it can move as far north as the Nikiski docks, creating dangerous conditions for vessels during and after mooring."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has access to live streaming from the cameras, helping agency analysts better evaluate ice conditions in the upper and middle inlet.

"We can compare what we are seeing on the web cameras with what we are seeing on satellite imagery to make more informed decisions regarding sea ice thickness and sea ice concentration," NOAA's National Weather Service said in the council's 2013 annual report. "In addition, the sea ice web cameras are essential for our sea ice analysis on days when we have no recent visual satellite imagery of the inlet due to cloud cover."

—WESLEY LOY