



Council Briefs

Newsletter of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council

First Quarter 2009

“The mission of the Council is to represent the citizens of Cook Inlet in promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and oil facility operations in Cook Inlet”

Drift River Terminal

At 10:30 PM on March 22, 2009 Mount Redoubt, located approximately 50 miles west of Kenai, erupted. Following the initial eruption, several more eruptions occurred and the resultant lahars caused flooding along with mud and debris build up at the Drift River Terminal, an oil storage and loading facility operated by Cook Inlet Pipeline (CIPL).

Prior to the eruption the RCAC staff organized a briefing for the Council from Cook Inlet Pipeline, Chevron, the United States Coast Guard, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and other regulatory agencies. After the briefing, the Council had a better understanding of the protective improvements Cook Inlet Pipeline had made to the facility and was assured that the oil reserves would be kept to a minimum. After the eruption caused substantial flooding at Drift River, the improvements to the dike system and the addition of the tertiary containment proved functional and protected the oil tanks. The CIPL employees evacuated the facility.



Drift River Tank Farm after initial lahar. Photo courtesy of ADEC



Photo courtesy of AVO/USGS, Heather Bleick

On March 29, 2009 the United States Coast Guard (USCG), State of Alaska Dept. of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), and CIPL established a **unified command** to work jointly to address the impact of Mt. Redoubt's activity on the operations of the Drift River Terminal. Soon after, Cook Inlet RCAC joined the Incident Management Team to collect information and to observe the Unified Command. During that time, Cook Inlet RCAC has worked extensively with the USCG and the

ADEC, and CIPL, to reduce the inventory at the facility. RCAC also encouraged Tesoro to help the situation by scheduling a tanker to facilitate the removal of the oil.

While most of Unified Command was focusing on minimizing risk at the Drift River Tank Farm, personnel from various agencies and industry and Cook Inlet RCAC were also focusing on gathering information and planning for any potential response activities if oil spilled. RCAC staff on scene compiled information and recommendations to help understand and evaluate risks based of various potential response scenarios.



Seabulk Arctic at the Christy Lee Platform. Photo provided by the Unified Command

Many of the projects that Cook Inlet RCAC has developed over the years directly applied in improving response decisions. For example, coastal habitats inventories would help to understand which shorelines would be most at risk from oil spills and imagery from shorelines in Cook Inlet taken at low tide would allow responders to see what the coastline underneath the frozen ice would look like - information imperative for knowing how to collect or clean-up oil nearshore or stranded oil.

To improve our understanding of physical processes in Cook Inlet and identify major data gaps we worked closely with the University of Alaska to purchase and deploy (with CISPRI) satellite drifter buoys and obtain surface current measurements using High Frequency Radar. In this situation, we quickly assembled a team who began deploying these radars and will monitor them for the next several weeks or months, while there is still some risk at Drift River (see High Frequency Radar Article).

Following an eruption on April, 4 2009, CIPL made the decision to remove as much oil from the terminal as possible and to temporarily suspend operations until the volcano's eruptive cycle enters a period of continued calm. As a result, approximately 60 percent of the 6.2 million gallons (148,000 barrels) of crude oil stored at the Drift River Terminal was transferred on April, 6 2009 to the Seabulk Arctic. About 840,000 gallons (20,000 barrels) of water from Cook Inlet was pushed back into the two oil tanks using the Seabulk Arctic cargo transfer pumps. The water will serve as ballast to prevent the tanks from becoming buoyant.

Throughout the event, Cook Inlet RCAC staff continued to do what OPA 90 intended with the creation of our Board, to foster long-term partnerships of industry, government, and local communities. To that end, Cook Inlet RCAC organized and hosted a community meeting that allowed Kenai Peninsula citizens to ask the Unified Command questions regarding the situation. The meeting was held at the Challenger Learning Center in Kenai on April 7, 2009, with a teleconference site at the Land's End Hotel in Homer. Individuals who could not attend either site were also given the opportunity to teleconference and ask questions.

“Our role from the start, was to bring everyone together to get a better understanding of the situation at the Terminal and to encourage actions that would minimize the potential threat to the environment”, said Executive Director Michael Munger. “We respect Cook Inlet Pipeline’s decision to suspend operations at Drift River and will continue to monitor the situation to ensure the state of the facility is kept environmentally safe.”

Cook Inlet High Frequency Radar Project

Cook Inlet RCAC Director of Science and Research, Sue Saupe, has assembled a team comprised of the [University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences](#), the [Alaska Ocean Observing System \(AOOS\)](#), Pacific Energy Resources, XTO Energy, and Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response, Inc.(CISPRI), and two local citizens, to deploy a series of High Frequency (HF) radars to map surface ocean currents in the vicinity of Drift River and nearby areas of Cook Inlet in order to better understand potential transport of surface oil. The team’s ultimate goal is to provide near real-time two-dimensional surface current data that can be used to better resolve features in data-poor areas of Cook Inlet that are not accurately modeled with existing forecast tools.

High Frequency (HF) Radar is a low power radio technique used to map ocean surface currents. Other common names for this technology include Ocean Surface Current Radar (OSCR) and Coastal Ocean Dynamic Application Radar (CODAR), although the latter is a brand of HF Radar made by SeaSonde. HF radar systems collect data about ocean currents, including speed and direction, in near-real time. This information can support a range of applications including search and rescue, oil spill response, oceanographic studies, and water quality assessments, among others. Since surface currents impact where and how oil will spread in the ocean, with HF Radar maps, responders will be able to better determine potential impacts to coastal resources and living marine resources and to develop appropriate response measures to mitigate the damage.

An HF unit is already in place on the Osprey Platform, a second on the property of a Scott Hammon in North Kenai, and a third array will be placed on Dr. Steve Okkoenen’s property. A final array will likely be placed around Ninilchik. Pacific Energy and XTO graciously agreed to provide logistical support during regularly schedule flights. The units need to be calibrated regularly and we are working with CISPRI to provide support for this task.



The deck of Pacific Energy’s Osprey Platform. Photo by Trenten Dodson

These instruments will be deployed for 40 days and will provide a long, hourly time-series of data that will give us a much more detailed understanding of how the strengths of the convergence zones (tidal rips) change throughout the tidal cycles and where eddies might set up during some portion of a tide.

Partners In Prevention/ Cook Inlet Facility Tours

March 24th signified 20 years since the Exxon Valdez struck Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound. During the time that has passed, significant advancement was made in oil spill prevention, response, and environmental monitoring. To recognize these advancements, The **Prince William Sound RCAC** organized the “Partners in Prevention”, a multi community event with panels and presentation connected to each community by video. Cook Inlet RCAC hosted the Kenai location and presented the final segment of the event to highlight citizen’s advisory and RCAC involvement within the oil industry. Other participating communities included:

- Anchorage
- Cordova
- Homer
- Seward
- Valdez

Following the Partners in Prevention event, several members from the **Pacific Environment** Russian Program visited Kenai to learn more about the oil and gas industry in Cook Inlet. The Cook Inlet RCAC organized a LNG presentation from ConocoPhillips and tours of Tesoro’s KPL dock and refinery, and Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response, Inc. (CISPRI).

We extend our sincere appreciation to Peter Micciche of ConocoPhillips, Capt. Jack Jensen of Tesoro, and Doug Lentsch of CISPRI for their time during these tours.



Top: Pacific Environment group poses with Doug Lentsch at CISPRI. Photo Courtesy of Pacific Environment
Bottom: Agrium dock, ConocoPhillips dock, and Tesoro KPL dock. Photo by CIRCAC

Vern McCorkle



At the recent Annual Meeting of the Cook Inlet RCAC, Mr. Vern McCorkle was posthumously honored with the 2008 Captain Glenzer Memorial Volunteer of the Year Award. Mr. McCorkle was a founder of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council, served on the Board of Directors, and on the Environmental Monitoring and Protocol committees. Mr. McCorkle was publisher of Alaska Business Monthly and chair of the business school at University of Alaska Anchorage. He died in early January 2009 at age 73.