



Citizens group investigates Cook Inlet's aging oil infrastructure

By [Elizabeth Harball, Alaska's Energy Desk - Anchorage](#) -
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“Cook Inlet’s arguably one of the most challenging bodies of water in North America to conduct oil recovery operations in,” said Lynda Giguere, a spokesperson for the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council, or CIRCAC.

Those challenges were highlighted last year, when oil company Hilcorp [took weeks](#) to halt a gas leak in Cook Inlet because icy conditions hindered repair efforts.

To help prevent future leaks, the Council is working with government agencies and oil companies to inventory all the pipelines in Cook Inlet. The area is known for its [harsh environment](#). Also, some of Cook Inlet’s oil infrastructure has been around since the 1960s. Giguere said that’s part of why compiling the report is a challenge.

“It’s an old field, there’s been a lot of operators there. There wasn’t always the record-keeping that we are looking for and expecting now done in the early years. So it’s a lot of information, there’s a lot of gaps in that information,” Giguere said.

One report aims to pin down where all the pipelines are, how much they carry and if they have leaked before. CIRCAC will investigate the details of 88 spills in the Cook Inlet region between 2001 and 2017, according to an initial [report](#) to the council prepared by the Nuka Research and Planning Group.

A separate report will address the complicated web of government agencies that oversee oil and gas operations in Cook Inlet.

With the gas line leak, “it took a while to clear up the jurisdictional confusion and who had oversight,” Giguere said in an email. “When regulators can’t decide who has jurisdiction there is no effective regulatory oversight, because each agency thinks someone else is overseeing it. The more agencies that could have oversight, the more complicated it gets.”

She added, “by sorting out in advance who has jurisdictional authority over any given area, infrastructure, process, etc., industry can more effectively understand what regulations are in play and how they must comply.”

Giguere says the first reports will be presented to the CIRCAC board in April, but the group hasn't yet determined when it can deliver final recommendations.