



NEWS RELEASE

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

410 Willoughby, Suite 303
Post Office Box 111800
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1800

Phone: (907) 465-5009 Fax: (907) 465-5070

Contact: Leslie Pearson, Prevention & Emergency Response Program Manager, (907) 359-9796

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Unalaska meetings focus on protecting Aleutian Islands

Public forum scheduled on places of refuge, geographic response strategies

May 15, 2007— The public is invited to weigh in on oil spill response planning for the Aleutian Islands. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has scheduled a public forum in Unalaska to solicit public input and knowledge on two key oil spill response planning tools: “places of refuge” and “geographic response strategies.”

“Places of refuge” are pre-identified sheltered locations where leaking or disabled vessels can be moored while oil is offloaded and repairs made. An interagency work group is working to identify approximately 70 such emergency mooring shelters along the Aleutian chain.

“Geographic response strategies” are oil spill response plans for certain areas. They identify particularly sensitive areas that need to be protected, types of spill response tactics likely to be most effective, and places where oil spill response resources should be located.

“The places of refuge and geographic response strategies are pre-planning tools to help decision makers responding to a crisis involving a stricken vessel or oil spill,” said Prevention and Emergency Response Program Manager Leslie Pearson. “They contain critical information that can be used to make better, more informed decisions. The local knowledge and information we gather now will help us protect these local waters in the future.”

The public forum is scheduled for Wednesday, May 16 at 6 PM at the Unalaska City Council Chambers, 43 Raven Way. Unalaska Mayor Shirley Marquardt will give welcoming remarks.

The interagency workgroup working on the strategies will meet the following day to review the strategies and public input received. The workgroup consists of representatives from DEC, the Departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Game, the Alaska Marine Pilots, U.S. Coast Guard, Aleutians East Borough, City of Unalaska, City of Akutan, City of King Cove, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Alaska Chadux and Nuka Research & Planning. The workgroup meeting will be held Thursday, May 17, starting at 9 AM at the Unalaska City Council Chambers.

Once the places of refuge and geographic response strategies have been identified and approved by the workgroup, they will be incorporated into the Aleutians Subarea Contingency Plan. The Aleutians Subarea Contingency Plan is the overall guide for responding to oil spills or other hazardous material releases in the Aleutian Islands region.

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Note: DEC is also holding a session on home heating oil tank spill prevention and cleanup on Tuesday, May 15, at 7:15 PM at the Unalaska Public Library Conference Room.

Background: There are 10-subarea government oil and hazardous substance contingency plans in Alaska. The Aleutian Subarea Contingency Plan is a supplement to the Alaska Federal/State Preparedness Plan for Response to Oil & Hazardous Substance Discharges (commonly referred to as the Unified Plan). The Unified and Subarea Contingency plans represent a coordinated and cooperative effort by government agencies and are written jointly by the USCG, EPA and DEC. The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 requires the USCG and EPA to prepare oil spill response plans for Alaska. Alaska statutes require DEC to prepare a statewide plan to address oil and hazardous substance discharges. The Unified Plan and Subarea plans meet the federal and state planning requirements. The Subarea Contingency Plans concentrate on issues and provisions specific to their particular subareas. Specific information includes: emergency response phone numbers, available response equipment and other resources, specific response guidelines, and information on hazardous substance presence and sensitive areas protection.

For more information on the geographic response strategies and places of refuge initiatives, visit www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/grs/ai/home.htm and www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/aipor/home.htm