






## State to launch North Slope inventory



by Steve Mac Donald  
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- The state of Alaska is ready to do something it's never done before: Launch a detailed inspection of the North Slope oil industry and everything connected to it.

The study hopes to determine the condition of every piece of equipment and pipeline it takes to ship oil from the North Slope to Valdez. (KTUU-TV)

Several state agencies including the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation are planning what they call a risk assessment.

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It is a modern marvel, drilling rigs producing oil in a desolate and sometimes hostile environment and then sending it 800 miles down a pipeline.

But after 30 years of life, but these technological wonders are showing signs of wear and tear and DEC Commissioner Larry Hartig said it's time for check up.

"It was just a time to take a very thorough look at this very integrated complicated system, assess its status, what the risks are," Hartig said.

Hartig said the DEC is about to set in motion a major study of Alaska's North Slope oil industry, from where it starts on the North Slope to where it ends at the Port of Valdez.

"What we're hoping it'll do is give us as regulators a better picture of where we need to put our focus in terms of oversight," Hartig said.

The DEC and other state agencies began planning the risk assessment after a pair of oil spills last year at Prudhoe Bay.

Hartig said corrosion due to neglect caused the leaks.

"The spills themselves, from an environmental perspective didn't have huge consequences," Hartig said. "But the second spill did get everybody's attention when the flow was shut down and the state started losing production and it affected the economy of this state."

When the assessment is done, the state hopes to have a baseline condition on every valve, every flow line and every pump station along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline system.

Marilyn Crockett is head of the Alaska Oil and Gas Association, a 17 member industry group made up of producers and refiners.

Crockett welcomes the study, which she believes will also validate the

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industry's maintenance practices.

"We told the state we'd be happy to engage with them on that," Crockett said. "We would hope that at the end of the analysis that it will show that the industry is taking all the proper steps and is insuring that the operations are conducted in an environmentally safe responsible manner."

And if not Hartig said the state will demand improvements.

"But from the state perspective the way we're looking at it is that's our oil going through the pipeline and we have an ownership in this we have great interest in seeing that continued production," Hartig said.

State regulators are hoping this first ever risk assessment will help prolong the life this pipeline and everything attached to it.

Next month the state will begin searching for a company to do the risk assessment, and plans to call for the actual study to begin late next spring or early summer.

Hartig said the industry, special interest groups and the public will get a chance to weigh in on the findings while the study is in progress.

Crockett said she expects the group conducting the study will have a lot of questions about operations on the North Slope.

She hopes the industry can answer those questions and clear up any misunderstandings before the final version of the study is released.

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