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COAST GUARD, STATE OF ALASKA, NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE DISCUSS ALEUTIAN ISLANDS RISKS

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - On November 29, the U.S. Coast Guard and the State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) met in Washington D.C. with the National Academies of Science Marine Board to discuss plans to develop a comprehensive risk assessment for the Aleutian Islands. The Marine Board agreed to develop a framework for a multi-stage risk assessment of maritime transportation in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Archipelago.

The grounding and subsequent oil spill from the M/V Selendang Ayu in December 2004, highlighted the need for a comprehensive risk assessment of maritime transportation in the Bering Sea and the Aleutian Island Archipelago. The U.S. Coast Guard and the ADEC are working closely together to ensure positive measures are taken to prevent any future major marine casualties.

The Coast Guard and the State of Alaska have a responsibility to minimize the potential for incidents and to be prepared for any contingency. Working in partnership, they continue to make progress in protecting the Aleutian Island region. The Coast Guard has installed a ship automated identification system (AIS) receiver at Scotch Cap to track vessels transiting through Unimak Pass. Stakeholder input and advice are now part of the emergency response process to establish priorities, objectives and action plans. Potential places of refuge are being identified and plans developed so that vessels in distress can be anchored safely while undergoing repair. Geographic response strategies (GRS)--site-specific spill response methods--are helping to expedite successful responses or mitigate spill impact to protect sensitive coastal areas. GRS provide first responders with specific guidance for a rapid deployment of pre-identified actions to protect priority sensitive sites.

In August, the U.S. Coast Guard sponsored a formal Ports and Waterways Safety Assessment (PAWSA) for the Aleutian Islands to examine preventative measures to improve overall safety in the region. The PAWSA, which included inputs from a diverse panel of government, maritime industry, and public stakeholders, judged that the high volume of vessel traffic transiting the North Pacific great circle route warranted more risk reduction measures. Approximately 3,600 vessels pass through Unimak Pass annually, including tankers, container ships, freighters and fishing vessels. During this workshop, a wide variety of options were examined for improving prevention of and responsiveness to another incident at or near Unimak Pass. Other options have been proposed outside of the context of the PAWSA. Taken together, these include:

- Traffic Separation Scheme or other routing measure
- Automatic Identification System
- Long Range Vessel Tracking System
- Tug Escorts
- Vessel Traffic Service (VTS)
- Pre-positioned Towing Package w/ heavy lift helicopter
- Dedicated Response Tugs
- Increased Response Equipment
- Heavy Oil Response Capabilities
- Additional aids to navigation

"World commerce and many economies hinge on shipping and trade routes through the Aleutians. Ultimately we need to protect the environment and the livelihood of those that call this harsh region home while recognizing the shipping industry as necessary to a healthy economy. The Bering Sea and the North Pacific are extremely dynamic regions. Any efforts must overcome the challenges of extreme weather, vast distances and limited infrastructure," said Capt. Mark R. DeVries, Commander Coast Guard Sector Anchorage and Captain of the Port Western Alaska.

In September, the ADEC published an update to *The Vessel Traffic in the Aleutian Subarea* which provides data and information regarding vessel traffic transiting within and through the Aleutians.

In November, the State of Alaska and USCG meeting with the National Academies of Science resulted in agreement that the Marine Board will

contact all major stakeholders for their input while developing a framework for a comprehensive risk assessment. The Board will also examine previous studies to determine what data and models will be needed to accomplish an assessment and will include this as part of the developed framework. The expected timeline for completing this project is nine months to one year.

It remains a priority of the Coast Guard and the State of Alaska to be good stewards and provide the best protection and management possible to all of the sensitive marine environments in Alaska while taking into account potential economic impacts and concerns.

The Vessel Traffic in the Aleutian Subarea: Updated Report to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (September 20, 2006) is available at: http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/ai_risk/ai_risk.htm

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