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State reviews input on oil and gas risk assessment

(Juneau, Alaska) The National Academy of Sciences recently issued comments on a proposed methodology for assessing the risks posed by Alaska's aging oil and gas infrastructure.

The risk assessment is one element of the State's response to oil spills and subsequent revelations about the condition of certain pipelines on the North Slope. Its purpose is to assess and characterize the status of Alaska's oil and gas infrastructure, and to identify components and management systems that pose the greatest risk to production, safety and the environment.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is leading the risk assessment project. It brought on an expert consulting team to develop a methodology, or approach for evaluating those risks. DEC held workshops around the state on the proposed method and invited the public, industry and government to comment on the approach. As part of its original development, the risk assessment project included plans for an independent, third-party peer review of its methodology. DEC commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to conduct that technical review.

The Academy's evaluation acknowledges the broad reach of the endeavor. It recommends several modifications to the proposed approach for evaluating risks. The review also acknowledges the importance of good industry information to the risk assessment's success.

"While there is a general consensus around the enormity and complexity of the undertaking, we are hearing somewhat disparate views about the best methods to achieve results," says Ira Rosen, project manager for the risk assessment. "The state oversight team is in the process of weighing the Academy's input, along with what we are hearing from the public, industry and government, to chart the best way forward. The next step is to complete the State's review and to optimize the methodology."

The risk assessment project is one component of a broader effort by the Petroleum Systems Integrity Office to improve how the State oversees oil and gas facilities and operations.

For an update on the Alaska Risk Assessment, to view public comments or the National Academy of Sciences report, go to www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/ipp/ara/.