

Goal: Establish Reciprocal Prevention Agreement between the U.S. and Canada

Need: Establish prevention standards for vessels sailing on innocent passage transiting the waters off the coast of the western U.S. and Canada

Tanker and cargo vessel traffic transiting the Gulf of Alaska is significant and expected to increase as Canada's inland crude is shipped to foreign ports via tankers from British Columbia. Prince Rupert is also slated for extensive container port expansion. The great circle route through the Gulf of Alaska is a major thoroughfare for vessels coming and going to Asia. Alaska and Canada have limited response assets throughout most of these remote areas. Several incidents have highlighted the lack of response assets along the coast of British Columbia and Alaska.

Because the consequences of spills in these areas are significant, Alaska would like to see an increase in prevention measures for vessels compliance. An agreement between the U.S. and Canada could establish identical requirements for vessels going to or coming from either country on the West Coast. Considering most the vessels transiting this route are engaged in trade with U.S. or Canadian ports, an agreement between the two countries would apply bilaterally and neither country would be imposing independent restrictions.

We suggest minimal, common sense, prevention requirements such as:

1. Required vessel routing that keeps vessels a safe distance from shore and allows for ample substantial response time. A process for approving route deviations due to weather could be included as well.
2. Early notification to the coastal state when a vessel incurs a casualty or is disabled.
3. Mandatory participation in a vessel tracking service that would verify compliance throughout transit and communicate deviations. There would be an associated fee for this service but if both countries have identical standards, neither establishes an economic disadvantage over the other. This option would achieve compliance without overburdening Coast Guard agencies.
4. Identification of places of refuge for vessels that are disabled.
5. Prepositioning of assets such as emergency towing packages and ship arrestors that can be utilized by both countries to slow down or arrest the drift of a disabled vessel to prevent their grounding.

Both countries collaborate heavily during drills, exercises and real events. The value of prevention is well understood. This proposal extends our existing cooperation into the realm of prevention where the impact could have substantial benefits for both countries.