

# Environmental Monitoring of Cook Inlet, Alaska, Through a Citizens Advisory Council

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The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA90), passed by Congress in response to the *EXXON Valdez* disaster, mandates two citizens councils to advise the oil industry and regulators on local environmental and safety concerns related to the operation of tankers, terminals and other facilities in Alaska. The two councils are modeled after the Sullom Voe oil terminal in the Shetland Islands, Scotland, and are meant as a demonstration program that could be utilized elsewhere in the United States. Both councils, Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (Cook Inlet RCAC) and Prince William Sound RCAC are funded by oil companies operating in each region. The formation, composition, and activities of Cook Inlet RCAC will be discussed.

Under Cook Inlet RCAC are two technical committees, the Prevention, Response, Operations and Safety (PROPS) Committee and the Environmental Monitoring Committee (EMC). The EMC is directed under OPA90 to "devise and manage a comprehensive program of monitoring the environmental impacts of [oil industry] operations. . ." in the Cook Inlet region. The Committee sought advice from environmental professionals in government, industry, and private practice in trying define this broad mandate and transform it into a practical and useful program. The EMC contracted for a consultant to devise a conceptual monitoring program, held a forum for discussion and comment on the conceptual plan, then implemented a pilot program for the field in the summer of 1993.

The pilot sampling program consisted of sediment and benthic tissue analyses, combined with toxicological testing of sediments gathered from 12 stations in four general areas of Cook Inlet. In addition, two "mussel watch" stations were moored in the Inlet, combining live mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) and lipophilic membrane devices for analysis and comparison.

Some of the future challenges faced by the Environmental Monitoring Committee are to expand the pilot program into a long term monitoring program, and to seek cooperation within the morass of Federal, State, and private entities charged with marine environmental monitoring. The ultimate goal is to utilize the results of a final monitoring program to make sound and well-reasoned recommendations to the oil industry and its regulators through Cook Inlet RCAC in the management and protection of the Cook Inlet environment. It is hoped that the efforts of the RCACs in Alaska will provide a viable model for constructive public participation in environmental decision-making elsewhere in the United States and the world.