

## Marine risks reviewed

Panel to look at Cook Inlet issues, solutions

Posted: August 23, 2011 - 8:00am | Updated: August 23, 2011 - 10:43am

By Molly Dischner

Peninsula Clarion

A federally-mandated study is under way to gauge marine transportation use in Cook Inlet.

Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Coast Guard — collectively the Cook Inlet Risk Assessment Management Team — are looking for people to serve on a 12-person advisory panel that will review potential risks in the inlet.

The panel will look at what can go wrong, how likely it is for something to go wrong, what the impacts of an accident or error would be, and how those risks can be reduced or mitigated, said CIRCAC's Jerry Rombach. Rombach is Director of Public Outreach for the advisory council.

The final product will be a report discussing and answering those questions. That document will be submitted to the Coast Guard, which will review it and see what can be implemented.

Rombach said that some recommendations could be things the Coast Guard can fix internally, while other suggestions might require legislation or larger policy changes.

Initial funding for the undertaking is from DEC, which contributed \$250,000. Rombach said the management team thinks it will get \$180,000 from another source soon. The study is expected to cost under \$2 million total, and Rombach said the team thinks all of the funding will eventually materialize.

Potential members should be stakeholders in the inlet in some way,

Rombach said. The stakeholders the team is looking for are representatives from Native organizations, subsistence users, other fishing interests, oil platform producers, the shipping industry and other groups with an interest in what happens in Cook Inlet. Organizers are hoping to find a representative and an alternate from each of 12 areas.

Essentially, the advisory panel will look at the question "Does Cook Inlet have navigation needs that need additional oversight," Rombach said.

The panel will consider whether the oversight is needed to prevent ship from running ground, and what happens when there is an incident.

Seldovia-based Nuka Research and Planning is leading much of the process, including providing information to the panel and facilitating its work.

A transportation analysis will drive much of the project. That analysis looks at who is in the inlet and what they're carrying. But Rombach said the risks largely boil down to fuel. Cook Inlet cargo is likely to be oil and gas — and even a cargo ship full of ping pong balls has fuel onboard that could be a problem if the ship was grounded, Rombach said.

"If the accident were to arise a spill, it doesn't matter what the cargo is," he explained.

The panel will conduct its work over several meetings.

"The first thing that the panel could do is review the maritime traffic studies," Rombach said.

Two contractors — Det Norske Veritas and Environmental Resource Management - West — put together a comprehensive look at what vessels are in the Cook Inlet, where they're going and what they're carrying.

"So (the panel will) see actually the amount and size and nature of all traffic for 2010," Rombach said.

Nuka will also use that data to project what Cook Inlet use will look like from 2011 to 2020, try to gauge the likelihood of an oil spill and look at how similar vessels perform around the world. The panel will review that information and use its varying backgrounds to come to its own conclusions about what those numbers mean.

Then the panel will have a workshop with experts to go over the consequences. That's when the panel will start to come up with its recommendations, Rombach said. The body will also look at their recommendations in terms of feasibility before working with Nuka on a final report.

"It's essentially an eight- or nine-step process," Rombach said.

Applications for the advisory panel are being accepted through Aug. 26. Rombach said the management team hopes to select participants shortly after that. The first meeting is scheduled for Sept. 12, in Anchorage. Panel members will be chosen based on experience Rombach said this isn't the first place in Alaska to review transportation policies and practices.

"As far as I know, this will be the third navigation risk assessment," Rombach said.

This assessment is modeled after similar work done in the Aleutians a few years ago. The Coast Guard, DEC and Nuka worked together on that project as well. The other past assessment was done in Prince William Sound.

The Cook Inlet assessment was spurred by a federal mandate. The bill that reauthorized the Coast Guard last year required that such an undertaking begin within a year. The Aleutians and Prince William Sound assessments were required by past congressional acts.

CIRCAC's participation is a natural extension of its role as a watchdog group formed after the Exxon-Valdez oil spill, Rombach said.

To apply for the panel go to [www.cookinletriskassessment.com](http://www.cookinletriskassessment.com).

Molly Dischner can be reached at [molly.dischner@peninsulaclarion.com](mailto:molly.dischner@peninsulaclarion.com).

Comment

Share

5

Recommend

0

Follow This Article



CLOSE X