

The Coast Guard officer also noted the smell of alcohol on the breath of Captain Hazelwood, and reported to his base in very blunt terms that he suspected that the captain was drunk. He was unable to establish the degree of intoxication, due to the lack of a testing kit, but he did request the assistance of the Alaska State Police to conduct the tests as soon as possible. Those tests were conducted the following morning, and did establish that the level of alcohol in Captain Hazelwood's bloodstream at the time was twice the legal limit.

At 6:00 A.M. on Friday, March 23 (six hours after the accident), officials from Exxon flew over the grounded tanker for the first time, and reported a massive oil slick streaming away from the tanker. They contacted the Alyeska oil terminal and ordered a quicker response and greater effort. The problem, the manager at that terminal reported, was that the single barge capable of handling the long containment booms had been out of service for two weeks and had been unloaded for repairs. Workers were preparing to reload the barge, he said, but the only employee who was capable of operating the crane needed for reloading had not yet reported for work. Later that morning the loading was completed and the barge was taken in tow by a harbor tug. At 2:30 P.M. the barge arrived at the wreck site, carrying all of the containment booms that were available at the terminal, and a number of centrifugal pumps to help in removing the remaining oil from the *Valdez*.

At 7:36 A.M. on Saturday, March 24 (31.5 hours after the accident), Exxon began pumping oil from the *Valdez* to a second tanker moored alongside, the *Baton Rouge*. At about the same time, seven Alyeska "skimmers," or barges with vacuum equipment designed to siphon oil off the surface of the water, arrived at the site. The skimmers, however, were designed to recover oil that had been bunched in a compact mass by containment booms. Those booms were still not in place, due to a shortage of tugs and to some degree of confusion in the means of unloading the booms and placing them in the sea. By nightfall, only 1,200 barrels of oil had been recovered.

By 11:00 A.M. on Sunday, March 25 (59 hours after the accident), the *Exxon Valdez* was finally encircled by containment booms. It had taken 2.5 days to get the booms in place, despite the original plan, which called for full containment of any spill within five hours. Most of the oil was now outside the booms in a slick that covered 12 square miles, and the wave action had begun to convert the crude oil to an emulsified "mousse" mixture of oil and water that quadrupled the volume. This emulsified mixture now lay 5 to 9 inches thick upon the surface of the sea. The specific gravity of the emulsified mixture was very different from the specific gravity of either water or oil, and the skimmers were no longer effective except when working on fresh seepages close to the grounded tanker, within the booms.

At 6:00 A.M. on Monday, March 26 (78 hours after the accident), the Coast Guard admitted that the situation was out of control. The first two days had been calm, but Sunday night winds as high as 73 miles per hour had arisen and driven the emulsified oil and water mixture 37 miles from the wreck site. It was swathing the islands and beaches throughout Prince William Sound with solid bands of black petroleum "gunk," the accepted term for the residue that is left after the more volatile elements in crude oil have evaporated. The skimmer barges and boom-tending boats had been forced to retreat to sheltered water. Flights into the *Valdez* airport, bringing additional supplies and people, had been halted. Most of the oil that had remained in the unruptured tanks of the *Exxon Valdez* had been pumped out, but it was now thought to be impossible

to recover any further substantial amount of the spill. Eventually, marks of this spill stretched 700 miles along the coast, spoiling fishery resources, wildlife refuges, and national parks in one of the most scenic regions of the country and killing sea birds, fish, and mammals in one of the prime marine habitats of the world.

Nearly two months after the biggest oil spill in American history, Alaskan officials say not a single mile of beach has been completely cleaned and that the death tolls of birds, fish and mammals continues to mount.

Large patches of oil, unintended in rough and remote seas, are still washing up on pristine Alaska beaches more than 500 miles from the reef in Prince William Sound where the *Exxon Valdez* went aground March 24.

The oil from the spill of 11 million gallons hit 730 miles of coastline, Alaskan state officials said today. Of that, only four miles have been declared cleaned.

The ecological toll of the spill thus far includes more than 11,000 birds of 300 different species, 700 Pacific seal otters, and 200 bald eagles, according to a tally by the State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Biologists say that the actual number of dead wildlife could be three to five times higher than those found because many of the animals have been washed out to sea or taken by predators.

On some beaches in Prince William Sound the oil is more than three feet thick, lodged in the rocks and providing a reservoir of fresh contamination at every high tide. (*New York Times*, May 19, 1989, p. 1)¹

The causes of the accident, while obviously related to the intoxication of the captain and the subsequent command of the ship by an unlicensed third mate, were thought to be more complex than that simple explanation. Two additional factors were mentioned in the early hearings of the Federal Transportation Safety Board that investigated the oil spill.

- *Tired crew members.* The crew members on the tanker were said to have been exhausted from working long hours, and not fully alert. The *Exxon Valdez* normally carried a crew of 20 persons. This crew size was considered to be typical for crude oil tankers, but it was substantially smaller than that required by Coast Guard regulations and union requirements on merchant cargo ships. The oil companies had argued that the new technologies automated the operations of their tankers and eliminated the need for a larger crew. The modern equipment, however, had to be manned and maintained, and consequently the automation did not keep the officers and crew from working extensive amounts of overtime and frequently going long stretches with little or no sleep. Crew members on the *Exxon Valdez* testified that they had worked an average of 140 hours of overtime per month per person for the six months prior to the accident. One hundred and forty hours of overtime per month and 20 days at sea per month plus the regular 8-hour watches works out to be 15 hours per day.

Many of the crew members were exhausted, a routine feeling on Exxon ships, they testified. (*New York Times*, May 22, 1989, p. 10)

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