

It should be explained, before discussing the results of these hearings before the National Transportation Safety Board, that the Alyeska Pipelines Service Company is not a subsidiary of the Exxon Corporation. It is a consortium owned by the seven oil companies who have drilling rights on the North Slope of Alaska and thus transport crude oil from the North Slope to Valdez Bay by a massive pipeline. Representatives of all seven companies serve on the board of directors of Alyeska. Exxon is the second largest owner, and is said to participate actively in the management of the company.

The first reason given for the slowness of response was a shortage of equipment. The oil spill contingency plan required Alyeska to maintain two barges, loaded with containment booms, and ready for use. At the time of the spill, only one barge was available. The other had been scrapped as old and obsolete, but its replacement was still in Seattle. There was a requirement in the contingency plan that Alyeska notify the state Department of Environmental Conservation if any equipment was out of service for any period of time. Alyeska now concedes that it failed to provide this notification.

The barge that was available had been damaged by a storm in January. It was still considered to be seaworthy, but the containment booms had been unloaded to facilitate repair. Repairs had been delayed, according to testimony by Alyeska officials, because the company had been unable to locate a licensed marine welder. Environmentalists at the hearing displayed the Valdez telephone book that listed four companies that claimed to provide licensed marine welding services.

Seven thousand one hundred feet of containment booms were stored at the oil terminal. The contingency plan did not specify an exact lineal footage that was to be kept in stock, but it can be understood that 7,100 feet would be enough to contain a spill around a 1,000-foot tanker only if the booms could be placed quickly, before the oil spread out upon the surface of the water. Three thousand feet would be required just to encircle the hull.

Ten skimmers, which are large suction units that can be mounted on barges and used in essence to vacuum oil from the surface of the sea, were available as promised in the contingency plan. However, replacement parts were not kept in stock, and equipment breakdowns were common because the machines were not designed to work on the emulsified mixture of oil and water that was formed rapidly through wave actions on the non-contained spill.

Other equipment that was needed either was missing or could not be found quickly. Heavy ship fenders, essential for the second tanker to come alongside the *Exxon Valdez* and pump out its remaining oil, couldn't be located for hours because they were buried under 14 feet of snow. Half of the required 6-inch hose, needed for the pumping, never was found and replacements had to be flown in from Seattle. The emergency lighting system, to illuminate the boom-laying and oil pumping work at night, was finally discovered off base, being readied for use in the Valdez winter carnival.

As a final example of the shortage of equipment, it was determined after the accident that there never had been enough chemical dispersant stored in Valdez to treat the oil spill, even had there been no disagreement or misunderstanding about permission to use this material.⁴

⁴ "Elements of Tanker Disaster: Drinking, Fatigue, Complacency," by Timothy Egan, *The New York Times*, May 22, 1989, p. B7.

In addition to the shortage of equipment, there was also a shortage of personnel. The oil spill contingency plan required Alyeska to have a crew of 15 persons on duty at all times. These were not oil spill experts. These were hourly paid workers responsible for the normal operations of the terminal, but according to the plan that should have included all of the skills and trades necessary to respond to emergencies, whether oil spills at sea, oil leaks on land, or oil fires at the terminal.

At the time of the spill, only 11 workers were on duty. Unfortunately, none of those people knew how to operate the crane, which was needed to load the barge with the long and heavy containment booms. A crane operator was finally located, but he was also the only one who knew how to drive the forklift, and he spent the morning after the accident, when speed in response was essential, running back and forth between the forklift and the loading crane.

Lastly, there was a lack of training. Alyeska had dismissed its oil spill response team in 1981. This was a group of 12 persons originally set up to contain and then clean up spills throughout Valdez Harbor and Prince William Sound. The duties of the spill response team were assigned to regular employees at the plant. At the time of dismissal, Alyeska had claimed that this arrangement would be superior as they would have "120 people trained in oil spill response rather than 12".

Some of the cited 120 staff at this. One senior employee says he has had "zero oil spill training, none." He recalls being summoned to two spills over the years. "I didn't know what the hell I was supposed to do, and when I found the guy I was supposed to report to, he did not know what the hell we were supposed to do either. We just stood there watching." (*Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1989, p. 1)⁵

Some of the operating managers within the oil industry have been greatly concerned by this tendency to replace specialized teams with personnel from the general workforce:

You either have a team of people who are dedicated to a specific task, and trained to perform that task under any and all conditions, or you have nothing. The Valdez terminal didn't have that trained team, and it showed.

We run into this same problem continually with fire drills. Previously, every refinery had a fire department, with fire engines, a fire chief, and a fire crew. Now, they just have the engines and, if they are lucky, they still have a chief who knows what he is doing and can teach the others. We are not lucky, and we don't still have a chief. It is company policy to run a drill once every six months. The bell rings, and all of the 9:00 to 5:00 desk jockey's jump on the truck, and away they go. When they get there, they don't know how to turn on the hydrant, they don't know how to work the pump, they don't know how to lay the hose and fight the fire, and they don't know what is safe and what isn't. We have not had a fire since the department was disbanded, but when we do it is going to get very bad very fast.

I can understand exactly what happened at Valdez. They had not had a major spill in 18 years, but when they did it got very bad very fast. (Statement of oil industry executive made in confidence to the case writer)

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