



THE MISSION OF THE ALASKA OCEANS PROGRAM IS: TO PROTECT AND RESTORE THE AMAZING DIVERSITY OF THE NORTH PACIFIC'S OCEAN ECOLOGY, INCLUDING FISH, WILDLIFE, AND SEABIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT, WHILE PROVIDING FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN USES.

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On 1-Year Anniversary of Largest Marine Oil Spill in U.S. Waters in Last Decade, Safety Coalition Criticizes Government, Industry Inaction on Shipping Safety

Proposes \$200 Million Government Settlement for Damages from Selendang Ayu Crash

Anchorage - On the 1-year anniversary of the largest marine oil spill in U.S. waters in more than a decade, the *Selendang Ayu* disaster in Alaska's Aleutian Islands, the Alaska-based Shipping Safety Partnership (SSP) today harshly criticized both the government and industry for failing to implement safety measures to help prevent similar tragedies. The SSP was formed in response to the *Selendang Ayu* disaster and is comprised of Alaska Natives, fishermen, conservationists, and scientists across the North Pacific (see www.alaskaoceans.org/sao/ssp.htm).

Today, the SSP sent letters to the U.S. Attorney General, Alaska Attorney General, and the responsible party (IMC Shipping), proposing that \$200 million be paid immediately by the ship owner and its insurer to settle its government civil liability in the case (see letter at <http://www.alaskaoceans.net/sao/aleutianoilspill.htm>). This amount would be over-and-above any claims by private parties and/or criminal claims by the government.

"A government settlement of \$200 million for natural resource damage claims would be commensurate with the damage caused, sufficient to address several cost-effective restoration objectives, and would clearly be in the public interest," said Prof. Rick Steiner, a SSP facilitator and conservation specialist at the University of Alaska.

The 738-foot Malaysian-flag *Selendang Ayu*, owned by IMC Shipping in Singapore, was in-route from Seattle to Asia when it lost power in a Bering Sea storm on December 6, 2004 and drifted ashore on Unalaska Island two days later. Six crewmen were lost, a US Coast Guard helicopter was destroyed and the vessel broke in two, spilling its cargo of 60,000 tons of soybeans and over 330,000 of toxic, persistent fuel oil into waters off the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR). The spill killed thousands of seabirds and other wildlife, closed fisheries, and oil contaminated many miles of shoreline. Oil remains in some beach sediments, and 26 shoreline segments will be assessed in spring of 2006 for additional treatment.

"One year after the *Selendang Ayu* tragedy, the shipping route across the North Pacific is no safer than it was before this disaster," said Walter Parker, a SSP member who headed the Alaska Oil Spill Commission after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill.

The SSP criticized the "astonishing inaction" of government and industry in implementing the safety measures SSP members proposed last winter. They include a risk assessment for the Aleutians, stationing adequately powered rescue tugs along the route to provide emergency towing assistance to disabled vessels, implementation of real-time satellite vessel tracking, emergency tow packages on vessels, clear communication protocols between ship and shore, better spill response capability in-region, routing agreements that protect sensitive shoreline habitats, attention to rat-free shipping, improvement of vessel construction standards, and imposition of a fee on all cargo hauled across U.S. ports to fund prevention and response measures for cargo vessels. To date, none of these safety measures have been implemented.

"Given the well-known continuing risks posed by the 3,000 merchant ships transiting the great circle route between Asia and North America, that shipping is increasing along the Aleutian route and it now includes larger vessels and some oil tankers, how many disasters will it take for government and the shipping industry to wake up and fix this broken marine transport system?" said Mark J. Spalding, J.D., MPIA, senior program officer for the Alaska Oceans Program (www.alaskaoceans.org) and a SSP member. "Today, we re-issue our call for immediate implementation of the safety measures we proposed last winter and complete removal of the *Selendang Ayu* vessel hull, which still lies aground off Unalaska Island."

The SSP commended Congress for passing an Energy bill amendment by Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) to re-authorize and augment the federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (5 cent/barrel oil tax reinstated and cap raised from \$1 billion to \$2.7 billion), and positioning of Automatic Identification System receivers for vessel tracking at Unimak Pass and Dutch Harbor.

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