



*"The mission of the Council is to represent the citizens of Cook Inlet in promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and oil facility operations in Cook Inlet."*

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## No "wobble room" in Cook Inlet ice

In 1999, the T/V **Chesapeake Trader** collided with a thick ice floe and cracked a starboard wing tank. Heavy ice ripped the T/V **Seabulk Pride** from its mooring in 2006, pushing the loaded vessel a half mile north. At low tide, her propeller and bow were out of the water. Less fortunate was the **Offshore Supply Vessel Monarch**. She sank after being pushed by ice into the Granite Point offshore platform.



Cook Inlet is one of the world's most dynamic bodies of water. Extreme tides, swift currents, and severe winds, combined with heavy winter ice make navigation treacherous and challenging. To prepare for what lies ahead, marine operators and navigators meet annually for a pre-winter ice meeting, a gathering for experts to share information in advance of the region's most demanding navigational season. Together, they review preventive measures, new tools and technology, lessons learned and steps taken to make the winter months ahead as safe and accident free as possible. As he addressed this year's gathering, USCG Captain of the Port for Sector Anchorage Paul Mehler put the seriousness of what lies ahead into sharp focus when he said, "Wobble room is non-existent."

Along with the U.S. Coast Guard contingent, this year's gathering included representatives of Tesoro, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), shippers and shipper agents, Crowley Marine, Southwest Alaska Pilots Association (SWAPA), Hilcorp Alaska, Cook Inlet Spill Response Inc. (CISPRI), Olympic Tug & Barge, Overseas Shipping Group (OSG) and Cook Inlet RCAC. The meeting took place on November 15, at CISPRI headquarters in Nikiski.

News that an interim replacement tug would be arriving in January 2013 to be followed in April by a newly-built permanent tug was among the topics of discussion. Tesoro Alaska announced that they were relieving the **Tug Vigilant** and replacing her with an interim tug in January, the **Tug Millennium Star**, and a permanent replacement tug in April 2013 called the **Tug Bob Franco**, now being built. (Read more about the tugs in our next story, below.)

Extreme ice in Cook Inlet poses a threat to life, property and the environment. The U.S. Coast Guard published the first extreme ice operational guidelines for Cook Inlet in 1999, as a result of the breakaway of the **M/V Ocean Laurel** at Nikiski's Agrium

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facility dock. But following the 2006 grounding of the **T/V Seabulk Pride**, the U.S. Coast Guard decided that Cook Inlet’s extreme ice conditions warranted more stringent guidelines. This year, the Captain of the Port issued a navigation advisory on November 21, with operating procedures for ice conditions in Cook Inlet developed in consultation with SWAPA and Cook Inlet maritime operators. To read the advisory and operating procedures, [click here](#).

Captain Mehler emphasized that the ice guidelines are a living document to accommodate the unpredictability of the season and incorporate new tools as they become available. Last winter’s weather conditions were so extreme, that ice conditions started in early November. Even though December was relatively warm, it was followed by a much colder January, with temperatures consistently below zero. Ice was still in the vicinity as late as April 15, which was unprecedented.

In addition to adherence to the ice guidelines, heading into winter ice season requires a variety of preventive measures be put in place and that everyone is cognizant of their availability and purpose. Preventive measures outlined for this year, include:

- The continuation of the ice mate program. A critical safety component, the ice mate program involves the presence of one extra person with the expertise of a licensed deck officer and chief mate on board to assist in navigation through ice conditions;
- Operating CISPRI ice scout vessels, the **Perseverance** and **Endurance**, to provide notice of heavy ice and large passages of ice flows with increased thickness;
- Conducting ice overflights as needed during the ice season (January to March) to assess and report dangerous ice conditions;
- Utilizing Cook Inlet RCAC’s ice forecasting network of six cameras (Port of Anchorage, Point MacKenzie, North Side of East Forelands, South Side of East Forelands, and XTO Platform).

Cook Inlet RCAC’s participation in the annual pre-winter ice meeting is crucial to our oversight role as the eyes and ears of the citizens of Cook Inlet. Along with oil spill training and drill exercises, these types of gatherings offer us an avenue to share tools, information, and progress we’ve made with our federal, state and industry partners; such as our role in securing the ice cameras in Cook Inlet, the status of the vessel traffic risk assessment, ongoing contingency plan review, Shorezone, and environmental monitoring program.