



# COOK • INLET • KEEPER

Protecting Alaska's Cook Inlet watershed and the life it sustains

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**FEBRUARY 3, 2006**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **TANKER *SEABULK PRIDE* PULLED FROM BEACH** *Groups Commends Response; Raises Questions, Calls for Better Safeguards*

ANCHORAGE – This morning shortly after 8:00 AM, emergency responders successfully pulled the grounded tanker *T/V Seabulk Pride* from a Nikiski beach in Cook Inlet, Alaska. The Unified Command reports no spill occurred during the re-float operation, and the vessel is undergoing inspection prior to transit to safer waters in Lower Cook Inlet later today. The tanker ran aground yesterday shortly after 5:00 AM when extreme ice and tides ripped it from its mooring at the Tesoro Refinery loading dock. Approximately 80 gallons of product spilled during the incident.

Cook Inlet Keeper applauds the work of the Unified Command, and renewed calls for tug vessel assists and other navigational safeguards in Cook Inlet's notoriously rough and icy waters.

"We commend the Unified Command and the workers and responders on-the-ground for the successful operation this morning," said Bob Shavelson, Executive Director of Cook Inlet Keeper. "But we dodged a big bullet here, and this should be a wake up call that Cook Inlet navigational safety needs to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Unlike other waterbodies, such as Prince William Sound and Puget Sound, laden tankers are permitted to ply Cook Inlet – even during extreme ice events – without the aid of tug boat assists or escorts. The *T/V Seabulk Pride* grounding is just one in a long series of incidents over the past 40 years where heavy ice and sea conditions caused spills, accidents, injuries and property damage. For the past decade, Keeper and other groups have called for tug assist vessels and other safeguards in Cook Inlet, and the 1992 *Dickson Report* strongly recommended the same.

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"Safe business is good business." said Rick Steiner of the Shipping Safety Partnership. "We've known the problems for years, and we don't need anymore studies. We need the shippers and the producers and the U.S. Coast Guard to push for stand-by tugs, weather/ice closures, rigorous mooring & loading protocols, better firefighting capabilities, and better salvage operations, including designation of ports of refuge for stricken vessels."

According to the Unified Command, the *T/V Seabulk Pride* will come into Kachemak Bay later today. But Kachemak Bay is a state-designated critical habitat area, and few safeguards exist to protect the region's sensitive marine resources should vessel inspections reveal leaks or problems.

"Now is the time to adopt new legislation that will ensure Cook Inlet fisheries and the communities they support are protected from the heightened risk of oil spills during heavy ice conditions," said Lois Epstein, Senior Engineer and Oil & Gas Industry Specialist for Cook Inlet Keeper.

While the vessel's re-float signals a successful response, various shortcomings became apparent. For example, tug boats with ample horsepower to move the loaded vessel were nowhere in the vicinity of the incident, and barges needed to offload ("lighter") product were similarly absent. Additional questions also arose. Why didn't the Coast Guard shut-down loading and unloading operations due to the extreme ice and tide conditions – it has done so before, and it issued special "extreme winter ice" rules January 30 highlighting the heightened risks recently. Furthermore, if adequate tugs assist vessels were not alongside, why were the tanker engines not running during the loading operation, in the event ice floes caused the vessel to separate from its mooring, as they have many times before?

"We'll need to break-down all phases of the response to understand why this occurred under the Coast Guard's "extreme ice rules," and why full response capabilities were not available within the crucial first 24 hours of the incident," Shavelson said.

For information on ice-related incidents in Cook Inlet and more information, go to: [www.inletkeeper.org](http://www.inletkeeper.org) For information on the Shipping Safety Partnership, see <http://www.alaskaoceans.net/sao/ssp.htm>

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