

CIRCAC recertified to 2016

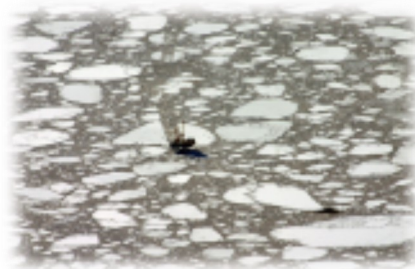
For the 24th consecutive year, the U.S. Coast Guard has unconditionally recertified the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC).

Rear Admiral D. B. Abel, Commander of US Coast Guard District Seventeen, notified CIRCAC of its recertification in a letter dated August 20. CIRCAC, now celebrating its 25th anniversary, was first certified in 1991 a year after its creation. The certification process is conducted annually by the USCG to ensure that CIRCAC is fulfilling its responsibilities as a federally mandated citizens advisory council. Unqualified recertification confirms that CIRCAC is consistently doing its job as Congress intended.

Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90), CIRCAC is responsible for environmental monitoring of the terminal facilities and crude oil tankers operating in Cook Inlet located south of the latitude at Point Possession and North of the latitude at Amatuli Island including offshore facilities in Cook Inlet.

Since 1990, CIRCAC has taken the lead in initiating and developing projects to identify and reduce the risks that could result in a catastrophic oil spill in Cook Inlet. Among our most notable accomplishments, CIRCAC led efforts to complete Cook Inlet's first comprehensive Navigation Risk Assessment, which was completed in 2015. We developed Geographic Response Strategies (GRS), which became a state-wide program. CIRCAC has performed extensive analyses of sediment and tissue samples to assess potential impacts of industry operations and headed Alaska's portion of National Coastal Assessment for Southcentral Alaska.

In 2001, we introduced the ShoreZone Mapping system for Alaska. The Alaska ShoreZone Project, now managed by NOAA, has now mapped more than 70 percent of Alaska's extensive coastline. Plans are under way to conduct additional surveys to close a data gap in the western Gulf of Alaska. To protect coastal habitats through improved oil spill planning and response, we developed the Cook Inlet Response Tool to integrate Alaska ShoreZone and resource data. This tool combines a ShoreZone imagery and video viewer with a long list of GIS spatial data layers and with Alaska Ocean Observing System real time observations and models for winds, waves, and ocean circulation. CIRT was rolled out to assist responders during the Kulluk grounding on Sitkalidak Island in December 2012. This is an ongoing project which will continue to evolve and improve.



To improve navigation safety in Cook Inlet during treacherous winter ice conditions, CIRCAC created, and continues to expand, a network of cameras to provide real-time, remotely accessed imagery of ice conditions for NOAA's ice forecasters. The Ice Forecasting Network of Cameras now consists of 9 high resolution cameras strategically located throughout the Inlet to aid mariners transiting when ice conditions pose the greatest risks.

CIRCAC

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In a further effort to prevent maritime accidents, CIRCAC advocated for the permanent assignment of docking assist tugs for Cook Inlet. Our persistence was rewarded with a series of tugs, each better equipped than the last, stationed at Tesoro's Niskiki dock. With the ultimate arrival of the **Bob Franco**, Cook Inlet welcomed a state of the art docking assist/rescue tug which was designed and built specifically to suit Cook Inlet's demanding conditions.

In 2014, we completed a Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Winter Prey and Habitat Study, which is providing some of the only information available on winter habitat and prey and informing other Cook Inlet beluga whale life history studies and the recovery team. We are now working with to incorporate our data into the Cook Inlet beluga whale data portal being developed by the Alaska Ocean Observing System for the National Marine Fisheries Service.

This year, CIRCAC was selected to serve as a voting member (as well as on the managing team) of the newly created Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee (HSC); the HSC, a priority recommendation of the Cook Inlet Navigation Risk Assessment, is Alaska's first formally organized HSC. The first meeting of the full committee is taking place at the Port of Anchorage on September 22.

To learn more about recertification, or any of these or other CIRCAC projects, please visit our website.