

January 1990

Community preparation and response to the Exxon Oil Spill in Kodiak, Alaska

Rachel Mason

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fmhi_pub



Part of the [Mental and Social Health Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Mason, Rachel, "Community preparation and response to the Exxon Oil Spill in Kodiak, Alaska" (1990).

FMHI Publications. 49.

https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fmhi_pub/49

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in FMHI Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

HAZARD HOUSE COPY

U3
187

Community Preparation and Response
to the Exxon Oil Spill in Kodiak,
Alaska²

HAZARD HOUSE COPY

Mason

QRR#36

HAZARD HOUSE COPY

**COMMUNITY PREPARATION AND RESPONSE
TO THE EXXON OIL SPILL IN KODIAK, ALASKA**

47765

By

Rachel Mason

QUICK RESPONSE RESEARCH REPORT #36

This publication is part of the Natural Hazards
Research & Applications Information Center's ongoing
Quick Response Research Report Series.
<http://www.colorado.edu/hazards>

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Natural Hazards Center or the University of Colorado.

FINAL REPORT:
COMMUNITY PREPARATION AND RESPONSE
TO THE EXXON OIL SPILL IN KODIAK, ALASKA

Rachel Mason
Kodiak, Alaska

A study of community disaster preparation and response to the March 24 Exxon Valdez oil spill was undertaken between May 22 and June 30, 1989 in the Kodiak Island area of south central Alaska.

The research questions were:

- 1) How do Kodiak area residents perceive the effectiveness of disaster preparation efforts?
- 2) How has the disaster affected "normal" life?
- 3) What is the perceived relationship between "local" and "outside" control of response activities?
- 4) What are ideas about the relationship of the disaster to pre-existing inter- or intra-community conflicts?
- 5) How is the disaster explained and who is blamed for it?

The population of the Kodiak Island Borough, including residents of the town of Kodiak, village residents, and persons who live in isolated outlying areas, is about 15,500. The city of Kodiak has a population of 6774, about 12% Native Alaskan and 12% Asian or Pacific Islander. The fishing economy of this community is highly seasonal and the population normally swells in the summer with transient fishermen and processing workers. The populations of six Alaska Native villages in the area range from 82 to 322, all of them over 70% Native.¹ Residents of these villages are involved in both subsistence and commercial fishing. In addition to comparing the way that Kodiak area village and Kodiak city residents responded to the oil spill, I also sought to assess the effect of the oil spill response and cleanup efforts on commercial fishermen's occupational identity, particularly that of salmon fishermen whose livelihood was most affected by the oil spill.

During the research period, most of the Kodiak Island coastline was impacted by oil. While at the beginning of the research there was oil only on the north and west sides of the island, by the end cleanup crews were working in all Kodiak area villages and on the road system near the town of Kodiak. This offered an opportunity to observe both preparation for oil cleanup and the cleanup effort itself.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Short field visits were made to the villages of Larsen Bay, Karluk, Ouzinkie, Port Lions, and Akhiok, all of which were actively involved in oil response at the time of the visit. The village of Old Harbor was not included, at the request of a community member. In each of the villages visited, I talked with response team leaders (who were also the Village Public Safety Officers, except in Akhiok), city, tribal council and/or Native corporation officials, health aides, Coast Guard monitors, beach cleanup and skiff monitor workers, and 10-15 members of the public. I was also able to observe the beach cleanup work in every location visited except Port Lions and Akhiok.

In Kodiak, I attended public oil spill meetings held three times weekly by the Emergency Response Services committee, whose members included the Kodiak city mayor, the city manager, the borough mayor, and the Coast Guard commander. Representatives of Exxon and of several state and federal agencies (Alaska Departments of Fish and Game, Fish and Wildlife, and Environmental Conservation; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service) were present at all meetings. I talked to the committee officials, employees of Exxon and Veco (the employment corporation contracted by Exxon to handle cleanup operations), a mental health center administrator, Kodiak Area Native Association personnel, a police officer, a representative of the Filipino-American association who had worked with processors to obtain claims from Exxon, and approximately 50 community members, 23 of whom were asked to respond to a short interview (see attached).

For the face-to-face interviews, respondents were initially chosen on the basis of involvement in the oil spill response (e.g., frequent participation in public oil spill meetings), and then by a "snowballing" technique in which respondents were asked to name others that should be interviewed. All were either fishermen (one was retired) or members of fishing families. Nine respondents were male, 14 female; there were 3 Natives and 20 non-Natives.

A survey asking the same 15 open-ended questions as those presented in face-to-face interviews was mailed to a random sample of 110 (10%) of gear license holders in Kodiak and Kodiak area villages. The mailed survey was intended to identify or counter researcher bias in the choice of persons interviewed. However, while the responses in the 14 mail surveys returned are quite comparable to responses acquired in interviews, this could simply indicate that the people most engaged in community action were the most likely to complete and return the questionnaire. Since the mail responses were anonymous, it was usually impossible to tell if the respondents were male or female, Native or non-Native. However, four of the mail surveys were postmarked in villages,²

RESPONSES TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) In the mail and face-to-face surveys, as well as in informal conversations, the questions involving disaster preparation were: "What other disasters have affected this community in the past? How do they compare with the oil spill? What kind of disaster preparation was in place in this community before the oil spill happened? Was this helpful in dealing with the present situation?"

What other disasters have affected this community in the past? How do they compare with the oil spill?

Mail survey (N=14):

1964 earthquake/tsunami: 12
 1912 Katmai eruption: 2
 Forest fire: 1
 1982 botulism scare: 1
 Demise of king crab fishery: 1
 Factory trawlers: 1
 Mismanagement of fisheries: 1
 Mother Nature's winters: 1
 This is not a disaster: 1
 Natural disaster is different: 2
 None compare to this: 1

Comments:

"To me this is not a disaster yet and very reluctant that it will become a disaster..." (Port Lions)

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

1964 earthquake/tsunami: 13
 1912 Katmai eruption: 3
 World War II/military: 3
 1982 botulism scare: 1
 Demise of king crab fishery: 2
 Bottomfishing: 1
 Terror Lake dam construction: 1
 Natural disaster is different: 5
 None compare to this: 3

Comments:

"Natural disaster is a lot different from a man-made disaster...Here the guy who did it throws salt in the wound. You could relate Chernobyl to it, how those people must feel."

"You can be philosophic about fishing. The fish weren't there. But this--you can't say, that's the lumps. A tsunami would be easier to deal with. It's gotten over with, you build back up."

What kind of disaster preparation was in place in this community before the oil spill happened?

Mail survey (N=14):

For earthquakes/natural disaster: 5
 Coast guard/maritime emergencies: 2
 None for oil: 1
 None: 4
 Don't know: 3
 No answer: 1

Comments:

"I know there was a plan but I'm not familiar with it."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

For earthquakes/natural disaster: 8
 Maritime emergencies: 1
 Emergency Services Council: 3
 Fish & Game knowledge: 1
 None/we weren't prepared: 4
 No answer: 6

Comments:

"There was very good government infrastructure in place to deal with natural disaster--loss of life, blood and guts. There was no preparation for oil spills of this magnitude."

"The public is not aware. Need four times the knowledge."

Was this helpful in dealing with the present situation?

Mail survey (N=14):

Definitely: 2
 Suppose so: 2
 Not really: 2
 Definitely not: 2
 Don't know: 3

Not applicable: 1
 No answer: 2

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Definitely: 2
 Suppose so: 2
 Not really: 6
 Definitely not: 3
 Emergency Services Council helpful: 3
 Not applicable: 1
 No answer: 8

Comments:

"This was different from a tsunami, because you have to protect, you have to prioritize. Different because mysterious."

"People here are goal oriented and used to solving big problems. Exxon has stifled this with their bureaucracy."

Kodiak's Emergency Services Council was organized after the 1964 earthquake and tsunami to deal with disasters affecting the community, but before 1989 it had never confronted a major natural or man-made disaster. In the past few years in Kodiak, there have been several "false alarms" of tsunami, including evacuations in May 1986 and November 1987. "Mock disasters" are also conducted on a regular basis. Kodiak's mayor stated at a public meeting on May 1 that this town, in comparison with Valdez, Cordova, and Seward, has been lucky to have had the luxury of time and distance from the spill, along with having emergency coordination for tsunamis in place and the experiences of past tsunami evacuations.

The majority of respondents mentioned the 1964 Good Friday earthquake and tsunami as a disaster affecting their community in the past, but many thought it was hard to compare with the present situation because the oil spill involves long-term impact, the possibility of toxic contamination, and dealing with a large corporation.

While city officials interviewed felt the Emergency Services Council had been a useful organization to deal with the present crisis, the public in Kodiak and in villages was not very familiar with the disaster planning, nor did they think it had been very useful in dealing with oil. Kodiak residents knew there was something in place for earthquakes and tsunamis; three of the face-to-face survey respondents mentioned the Emergency Services Council. Village residents were less familiar with disaster preparation efforts; most people I talked to were unaware of any disaster preparation committee within their community and did not

believe Kodiak's Emergency Services Council provided services that would be helpful to them.

In addition to preparing and implementing plans for emergency services in disaster, the purpose of the Emergency Services Council is to "provide an organization for the coordination of emergency services functions with all public agencies, affected private persons, corporations, and organizations" (Kodiak Island Borough Charter 2.41). To this end, the Council held public oil spill meetings throughout the summer. The mental health professional interviewed thought that holding frequent public meetings was the best thing that the Council could have done for community morale and communication. For the most part, community members agreed, but there was frustration at the way the meetings were conducted, and villagers were usually unable to participate in the Kodiak meetings.

Saarinen and McPherson (1981) made a study in Kodiak appraising the U.S. Coast Guard's warning system in regard to a potential landslide. They stated:

In Kodiak, the percentage of the population with direct natural disaster experience is much higher than the national norm. This, and their appreciation of the risks of fishing Alaskan waters and living in an isolated community, has made them less fearful of natural disasters and more willing to accept and live with the excesses of nature. Accordingly, the possibility of a landslide on Pillar Mountain is not as frightening as it might be to other communities. This in part explains the public's reluctance to consider Pillar Mountain a serious threat. (p. 45)

The authors thought one reason people in Kodiak were hostile to the idea of hazard notification was that they felt it threatened their livelihood (72), and that this attitude engendered "intense reactions and distrust of scientists ...in an emotionally-charged political atmosphere" (73).

While fishermen and others in Kodiak are accustomed to the possibility of fishing disasters, earthquakes, and tsunami, the oil spill was thought to be qualitatively different. Distrust of scientists and government agencies was particularly strong in Kodiak villages. For example, in villages where seafood had been sent away for testing for oil contamination by state agencies and by a firm contracted by Exxon, there was either frustration at not getting back any results, or disbelief of those results that were reported.

2) Information on the relationship of the disaster to "normal" life was sought in the questions: "How has the oil spill already affected your life? How do you think it will affect your life in the future?"

How has the oil spill already affected your life?

Mail survey (N=14):

Fishing livelihood affected: 9
 Added stress: 2
 Uncertainty: 4
 Subsistence lifestyle threatened: 1 (Old Harbor)

Comments:

"...basically it has changed our lifestyle from one of independence to one of dependence. We are now dependent on the whims and feel at the mercy of a major oil company. When you are able to fish you are depending on your own skills and initiative for your livelihood. Changes your self-image."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Fishing livelihood affected: 9
 Added stress: 9
 Uncertainty: 3
 Disrupted family/marriage relations: 4
 Fear of contamination of subsistence foods: 3
 No change at all: 1

Comments:

"People's attitudes toward each other have become harder and calloused, colder, the opinion about outsiders has changed significantly."

"I am desperately sad that I can't fish salmon...this season I was full of anticipation."

"Can't get any more clams till they're tested, gumboots, or sea urchins. Concerned about food animals like deer that eat kelp, and seals. It's all contaminated."
 (Larsen Bay)

"Insecurity, stress, being scared about your existence because it's your main income. Both of our main income is salmon fishing."

How do you think it will affect your life in the future?

Mail survey (N=14):

Fishing livelihood will be affected: 6
Subsistence lifestyle will be affected: 1 (Port Lions)
Don't know: 3

Comments:

"We are a town surrounded by water. We make our living off the ocean. It will affect us in every way."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Fishing livelihood and/or fish prices will be affected: 10
Subsistence lifestyle will be affected: 1
Economic impact on entire community: 3
Environment will be impacted: 5
Family life will be affected: 3
Don't know: 2

Comments:

"I will postpone my thinking about buying a subsistence site...It's passed my mind to think about, do I want to be here the next ten years? A lot of it is related to my children."

Particularly for Native village residents, but for some non-Natives as well, there was serious concern about the toxic effect of oil on subsistence foods such as fish and shellfish. A woman in Ouzinkie said, "I guess we'll all have to become cowboys and eat ranch food! You have to get it somewhere!" Others in Ouzinkie mentioned that they couldn't use kelp for fertilizer, as they normally do, and that they were reluctant to eat deer this year because they might have eaten oily kelp. Other fears about toxicity included a concern about increase of cancer rates.

Uncertainty about the future was expressed in statements such as "Sure, we'll have money from Exxon for awhile, but where will that get us later?" Two Native respondents stated that if the oil spill destroyed the subsistence lifestyle, it would take away the only thing that is left of traditional culture.

Because all the survey respondents were either commercial fishermen or spouses of fishermen, it is not surprising that loss or threatened loss of fishing livelihood was frequently mentioned as a negative effect of the oil spill. Respondents from the town

of Kodiak were also likely to mention increased mental stress and emotional upheaval because of the uncertainty about whether there would be a salmon season. Until July, salmon fishermen still hoped that there would be an opening, and the Department of Fish & Game continued 96-hour notices until then. Increased family and marital stress was perceived as a result of fishing uncertainty.

3) Questions dealing with local versus outside control of the oil response and cleanup were: "What is your opinion of how the oil response and cleanup is being handled? What do you think of how Exxon is handling the response? What do you think of how the Kodiak city/borough government is handling the response? How do you rate your community's involvement in responding to the oil spill? What other agencies or individuals do you think should be involved that are not involved? What should they be doing? Who do you think should be in charge of handling the disaster response in your community?"

What is your opinion of how the oil spill is being handled?

Mail survey (N=14):

Disorganized: 3
 Slow: 4
 Some are trying: 2
 Suspect manipulation: 2

Comments:

"A lot of the innocent or small fishing operations have been forgotten or overlooked."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Disorganized: 4
 Slow (need more action, reaction is poor): 7
 Some are trying: 6
 Suspect manipulation (or public relations only): 5
 Too much politics: 2
 Don't understand who's in charge: 1

Comments:

"...too slow. Is it the problem of bureaucracy, of Veco?... Too much politics is causing confrontation, money is slowing us down."

"I don't fully understand who is in charge--Exxon, Fish & Game, Veco, DEC--and if it is being done satisfactorily or not."

What do you think of how Exxon is handling the response?

Mail survey (N=14):

Slow, reluctant: 5
Buying people off with money: 3
Arrogance, lack of compassion: 3
They have control over us: 2

Comments:

"They have control by using their money and keeping people confused, not letting the community get organized."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Good: 2
Incompetent: 5
Buying people off with money: 2
Arrogance, lack of compassion, ponderous: 2
Not really interested in cleaning up: 7
It's a public relations deal: 3
Manipulating: 5

Comments:

"Probably the best way they can."

"It's so hard to deal with a big corporation..."

"Exxon's moral ambivalence scares me to the core."

What do you think of how the Kodiak city/borough government is handling the response?

Mail survey (N=14):

Good/excellent: 4
They're trying: 6
No power against Exxon: 2
Not good: 1 (Old Harbor)
Not familiar with it: 1

Comments:

"Their intentions were good until they turned it all over to Exxon."

"Generally local government responses are inadequate to deal with spills this large."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Good/excellent: 4
 They're trying: 5
 OK: 2
 Not good: 4
 No power against Exxon: 2
 Emergency Services Council is good/they're trying: 3
 Borough doing better than city: 4
 Too much politics: 4
 Don't know/haven't paid attention: 3

Comments:

"Don't know--haven't heard from them." (Larsen Bay)

"Their response was pretty consistent, they catered to special interest groups...They were dealing with whoever made the most noise."

How do you rate your community's involvement in responding to the oil spill?

Mail survey (N=14):

Good/excellent: 9
 People volunteered to work for free: 3 (1 Larsen Bay)
 Mixed: 1

Comments:

"Exactly as one would expect--all concerned; many involved; a lot look the other way; a very few merely look at it as a lazy person's windfall."

"The poor people are naive and trusting."

"100%." (Old Harbor)

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Good/excellent: 5
 Fair: 2
 Poor: 7
 Mixed: 10
 Financial greed prevents unity: 5

Comments:

"Early on I heard, it's a fishermen's problem."

"Kodiak fisherpeople are independent, self-reliant, egotistical folks, and in this situation I think those qualities have hindered their organization."

What other agencies or individuals do you think should be involved that are not involved? What should they be doing?

Mail survey (N=14):

Federal government: 3
 State government: 2
 Exxon reps in villages/other Exxon reps: 2
 Coast Guard: 1
 Fish & Game: 1
 Native corporations: 1
 Fishing industry: 1
 Enough/too many agencies already: 2

Comments:

"I think there are enough agencies involved. Too many overlapping jobs being performed already."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Federal government: 4
 State government: 4
 Exxon reps in villages: 1 (Larsen Bay)
 Armed forces: 1
 Fish & Game: 1
 Natives, Filipinos, women: 1
 Women's Resource Center: 2
 Kodiak Council on Alcoholism: 11
 Fishermen: 5
 Seiner fleet: 3
 Local concerned citizens: 3

Comments:

"I don't know--all the agencies that could do something really tried."

"I still think if they had let the seiner fleet loose it would have been really successful. Then no agencies would be involved. It would be natural competition, like fishing."

Who do you think should be in charge of handling the disaster response in your community?

Mail survey (N=14):

Local people: 5
Task force of regular individuals: 2
Not Exxon: 2
Someone over Exxon: 1
Federal government: 1
State: 1
Borough/city: 2
Fishermen: 1

Comments:

"Our VPSO [Village Public Safety Officer] is in charge and is doing a superior job. There is no better choice."
(Larsen Bay)

"It should be someone outside of local government. An independent party."

"Local people familiar with the area but with help from agencies and companies with equipment and know-how."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Local people: 5
Task force of local individuals: 6
Task force of agencies: 1
Not Exxon: 1
Exxon rep in our village: 1 (Larsen Bay)
State: 1
Coast Guard: 2
Borough/city: 8
Emergency Services Council: 3
Fishermen: 2
Natives: 2

Comments:

"An entity representing a broad spectrum, with no possibility of personal gain."

"The women, somebody from the Women's Resource Center. Senior citizens. Natives, processors, fishermen. There should be a representative of every group involved. One or two counselors from Mental Health. A very objective monitor, like a local judge."

"The Emergency Services Council needs to have a little more teeth to them, a bigger stick or whatever."

The question about the way the cleanup was handled received an array of responses, most expressing frustration with the slow speed and disorganization of the effort. There were several suggestions that the cleanup was not being directed by persons with local knowledge: "All Exxon knows how to do is write checks." Especially in Kodiak villages, there were complaints of a parade of visiting outside "experts" from various agencies and the high turnover of Exxon representatives. While several people mentioned that they appreciated Exxon's cooperation with the Department of Fish & Game to make sure key commercial and subsistence areas were protected from oil, one person in Ouzinkie told me that they had protected the wrong areas.

In answers to the question concerning Exxon's handling of the situation, Kodiak residents were likely to think problems in Exxon's handling of the cleanup were calculated rather than based on incompetence. "It was a PR deal," was a typical comment. In the villages, I heard about specific problems: In Larsen Bay and Karluk, they were having a hard time getting materials and supplies; at the time I visited Port Lions, there was a glut of materials and supplies for beach cleanup, but cleanup had not yet been authorized. Especially in Ouzinkie, there was a strong desire for more local boats to be hired for charters.

Local hire for beach cleanup work was also of great concern, both in Kodiak and in villages. There were rumors, denied by Veco representatives, that Veco work crews were composed mainly of non-Alaskans. Two Veco employees told me that Veco higher-ups wanted to work in the interests of Kodiak area or Alaskan residents but that their hands were tied by Exxon. While there were many complaints about favoritism in hiring practices both in Kodiak and in villages, these tended to be directed at local people employed by Exxon, Veco or other agencies, rather than at outsiders.

Some community members in Kodiak used military images to describe the summer's events: Kodiak was "under siege" or "under foreign occupation" by Exxon or Veco. Such imagery was supported by the appearance of an "Exxon Command Center" with uniformed guards, the presence of uniformed personnel from the Coast Guard and U.S. Park Service at oil spill meetings, and the regular reports of wildlife body counts and the activities of cleanup crews on all fronts.

There was a mixed response to the question of how the city and borough were doing. There were a few suspicions that local politicians were out for political or personal advantage. Several Kodiak residents commented that it was a mistake or a "sell-out"

for local officials to turn control of the cleanup over to Exxon. Village mayors and other officials were sometimes especially isolated from control over the cleanup, since communication from Kodiak concerning the cleanup came through the designated response team leader. Many village residents thought there should be more support and concern for the villages from the Kodiak city and borough and from the Kodiak Area Native Organization.

Most mail respondents said community involvement was either excellent or good, with three of them commenting favorably about volunteer efforts. Five of the face-to-face respondents indicated that financial greed was a hindrance to positive community involvement. Some people I talked to interpreted "community involvement" to mean volunteer work as opposed to working for money. However, several villagers in Larsen Bay commented on the benefits of many people getting jobs, hence getting involved. In that community, even some not technically hired by Veco were getting money by babysitting for children of cleanup workers. However, especially in Larsen Bay, Akhiok, and Ouzinkie, but also in other villages, there was a problem with city or Native association employees leaving their regular jobs to work for lucrative Veco wages.

There were many different responses to the question of who should be involved that was not presently involved. While mail respondents usually mentioned state, federal, or Native agencies, the face-to-face respondents were more likely to mention categories of persons, e.g. fishermen, Natives, or women. The question of who should be in charge also brought a wide variety of responses, although a large number of both Kodiak and village residents thought that someone with local knowledge should have control.

4) Questions dealing with the relationship of the disaster to pre-existing inter- and intra-community conflicts were: "What problems have come up in the community as a result of the oil spill? Have any problems been resolved as a result of the oil spill? Do you see any good things coming out of this situation?"

What problems have come up in the community as a result of the oil spill?

Mail survey (N=14):

Economic dislocation: 6
 Fear of contamination of subsistence foods: 2 (Old Harbor,
 Larsen Bay)
 Uncertainty about fishing future: 2
 Social problems: 1
 Racial/ethnic strife: 1

Fighting over charters and money: 2
 Strain of dealing with Exxon: 1

Comments:

"It seems the oil spill has overshadowed everything else in our community."

"Fear, greed, dissention."

"Economic dislocations. Hysteria over unknown spill effects."

"People are afraid to eat the seafood off the beaches..."
 (Larsen Bay)

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Economic dislocation: 10
 Fear of contamination of subsistence foods: 1
 Uncertainty about fishing future: 2
 Social problems: 9
 Lack of attention to ongoing problems: 1
 Racial/ethnic strife: 1
 Division of fishing fleet/community: 10
 Fighting over charters and money: 10
 Political conflict: 2
 Suicides: 3

Comments:

"People arguing among themselves. That individualism that is in the nature of this community."

"The dissention that gold-rush type money does to a community."

"Like a farming community that has to watch their crops die in the field. Only fishing and farming communities understand this. It's not 9 to 5, you're driven by what you want to do."

Have any problems been resolved as a result of the oil spill? Do you see any good things coming out of this situation?

Mail survey (N=14):

None or very little: 7
 Financial benefits: 2
 Made me evaluate myself: 1
 People working together: 1

Awareness of environment: 3
 Better prepared for future spills: 3

Comments:

"Much better pending legislation. Too bad it always takes a disaster to spotlight a weakness."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

None or very little: 7
 Financial benefits: 3
 Made me evaluate myself: 2
 People working together: 8
 Awareness of environment: 3
 Better prepared for future spills: 5
 Better understanding of corporations: 2

Comments:

"It's good to be knocked out of this idealistic head I have."

"I've met comrades-in-arms outside of the fishing community."

"People like seiners and setnetters are trying to band together now, people who always have conflicts."

The dispensation of Exxon money was the cause of many of the problems mentioned. There was division between "haves and have-nots," the disaster providing financial gain to some and losses to others. The boat charter system and Exxon and Veco hiring policies were thought to have created bad feelings; some thought that existing divisions between Natives and non-Natives, fishermen and processors, different gear types of fishermen (e.g., seiners, setnetters, dragners) or townspeople and Coast Guard had been exacerbated. One villager said that the situation had turned "friend against friend, community against community."

Fishermen were also concerned about the possible long-term effects of the oil spill on the market for fish and the uncertainty of the future of fishing. One Kodiak man said that while fishing is geared for economic disaster because of "normal" risks, he didn't know how resilient the fleet could be this time.

Several respondents mentioned that the oil spill had offered a new arena for pre-existing personal and political conflicts; a respondent in Larsen Bay said, "They're always bickering, now they've got new things to bicker about." Respondents were more likely to point to problems that had already been there than to refer to new divisions of the fishing fleet or factions within communities. There were several mentions of added stress in the communities, as well as reference to "high tempers."

Several Kodiak respondents thought the recent high number of suicides and suicide attempts (in Kodiak and in one village) was related to the oil spill, while one resident of that village very strongly felt there was no connection between suicides and the disaster. Some Kodiak and village residents felt that an increase in drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, and crime were either already present or forthcoming because of the oil spill. One Kodiak respondent said the disaster had diverted attention away from "normal" ongoing community problems. This was also true in Port Lions, Ouzinkie, Karluk, and Larsen Bay, where the persons normally working as Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) were working as oil spill response team leaders and were unable to devote their time to police work. Public safety officers in all of the villages visited denied any oil-related increase in crime rates; in July, according to a Kodiak police officer, there had actually been a decrease of domestic police calls compared to other years.

Some village residents wondered about the toll the cleanup was taking on the children who were used to having both parents around in the summer. In Akhiok, I was told that "the kids are watching the kids." In Karluk, a woman said she could tell that family stress was wearing off on the children.

Not too many people thought that anything good was coming out of the situation, although several face-to-face respondents commented the disaster had brought unity of the fleet, or unity of fishermen with others in the community, against a common enemy. Some respondents spoke favorably about the short-term financial gain of working for Exxon or Veco, but there was concern, particularly in Akhiok, because many people were working on the oil spill instead of putting up salmon for the winter. Because it was feared that people might spend all their "oil money" before the winter, the longer-term economic picture was bleak.

5) The question concerning explanation and blame for the disaster was: "Who or what do you blame for this disaster?"

Who or what do you blame for this disaster?

Mail survey (N=14):

Exxon: 10
 Hazelwood: 3
 Crew of Exxon Valdez: 2
 State/Governor: 6
 Federal government/President: 3
 Coast Guard: 1
 Alyeska: 4
 Department of Environmental Conservation: 1
 Greed: 2
 Human error: 1

Comments:

"Greed for profits and overlooking their (Exxon's) responsibility to the rest of the world to keep it clean."

"The state--should have ensured Valdez response team was real."

Face-to-face survey (N=23):

Exxon: 12
 Hazelwood: 5
 Crew of Exxon Valdez: 2
 State/Governor: 12
 Federal government/President: 2
 Coast Guard: 7
 Alyeska: 5
 Department of Environmental Conservation: 2
 Greed: 1
 Human error: 1
 People of Alaska/American public: 5
 Oil consumers: 7
 Oil industry: 4

Comments:

"The Alaska state government, the feds, Exxon big time, all oil companies, us as Americans for being so oil-dependent, for being in the pocket of oil companies."

"Everybody can bear a little bit of the burden."

"Human failure. Even if one person triggered the deal, nobody was ready for it."

More than half of both the mail and face-to-face respondents said they blamed Exxon for the disaster. Only 8 of the total 37 survey respondents mentioned Captain Hazelwood. No category of respondents was likely to pin the blame on a single agency or individual, but the face-to-face respondents tended to assign the blame to the oil-dependent system itself. Two people I talked to in Kodiak and two in villages theorized that the oil spill had been engineered on purpose, either to raise oil prices or for unknown reasons.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

In regard to the first research question, "How do Kodiak area residents perceive the effectiveness of disaster preparation efforts?", few of the respondents thought that the Emergency Services Council was effective for dealing with a man-made oil spill. Commercial fishermen, both from Kodiak and Kodiak area villages, did not seem to think that working in a hazardous and risky occupation better prepared them for dealing with this situation. While Kodiak residents were more likely to say the disaster preparation for natural disasters was effective, village residents tended to have a more fatalistic or cynical view.

The second research question was "How has the disaster affected "normal" life?" The oil spill was seen by fishermen to threaten not only their financial livelihood, but also their independent occupational lifestyle. Village residents, who are more dependent on subsistence foods than Kodiak city residents, spoke more literally than Kodiak city residents about the possibility of oil contamination, while Kodiak residents were more concerned than villagers about the "polluting" effects of Exxon money. In Kodiak, the oil spill was seen more in terms of economic and social dislocation than in terms of a physical threat.

The third question addressed the perceived relationship between local and outside control of the oil spill response. Kodiak area fishermen, who have typically resented the interference of outsiders in "normal" fishing, wanted local boats to be chartered and wanted local knowledge of fishing to be used in the cleanup effort. Village residents rated their communities' response higher than did Kodiak residents, and had more confidence in the leaders in their own communities. Kodiak city residents were more willing to adopt an adversarial stand toward local leaders and toward Exxon representatives, and they also had more opportunities to voice their opinions at oil spill meetings. "Local control" was sought-after from the beginning of the disaster response, but more so as the summer progressed and the presence of Veco and Exxon became more dominant in each community.

The fourth question asked, "What are ideas about the relationship of the disaster to pre-existing inter- or intra-community conflicts? Fishermen suspected that Exxon manipulated conflicts between fishing gear types and factions in order to prevent unity of the fleet, but also saw new possibilities for unity of fishermen and others against a common threat. The conflicts mentioned by villagers tended to be between individuals or families, while Kodiak city residents more often mentioned conflicts between categories of people. However, I heard about many personal conflicts in Kodiak as well.

The fifth question was, "How is the disaster explained and who is blamed for it?" Expressing distrust of "big business," fishermen (especially small-boat fishermen) explained the disaster as brought on by Alaskans' dependence on oil interests and by the cumbersome manipulations of agencies and corporations in the service of such interests. Kodiak city and village residents alike found it hard to pin blame for the disaster on a specific agent. "Exxon" was the main villain, but most were less concerned with finding an original source of blame than they were with criticizing the agencies and representatives currently operating in Kodiak. Generally, non-Native residents of the city of Kodiak seemed to feel more of a sense of betrayal by agencies (local, state, and federal) than Native villagers. Perhaps villagers were more cynical because of long unsatisfactory experience in dealing with such agencies.

The survey responses, along with other information gathered, point to a wide array of specific issues but also to a convergence of "moral imagery" in community response to the oil spill. This imagery pits the independent commercial fisherman, or the Native subsistence user, against big business and a faceless corporation. The oil spill was seen as a serious threat not only to economic livelihood but to the occupational and cultural identity of Kodiak area residents.

ENDNOTES

1. Population figures obtained from the Kodiak Island Borough Special Census.
2. All five of the mail respondents who voluntarily identified themselves were male.

REFERENCES

Kodiak Daily Mirror, various issues.

Kodiak Island Borough Charter, (rev. 1987).

Saarinen, Thomas F. and Harold J. McPherson
1981 Notices, Watches, and Warnings: An Appraisal of the
U.S.C.G.'s Warning System With a Case Study from Kodiak,
Alaska. Natural Hazard Research Working Paper No. 42.

Box 350
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

June 7, 1989

To Whom It May Concern:

I am conducting a survey of community responses to the Exxon oil spill in the Kodiak area. This study is funded by the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Center at the University of Colorado and by the National Science Foundation.

Your name was chosen as part of a random sample of gear license holders in Kodiak and Kodiak area villages. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on the survey and return it as soon as possible in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. ALL RESPONSES ARE ANONYMOUS, but if you would like to know the results of the survey, please enclose your name and address separately.

If you need more information or would like to discuss the study, feel free to call me at 486-2810.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Rachel Mason

8. Who do you think should be in charge of handling the disaster response in your community?

9. What other disasters have affected this community in the past? How do they compare with the oil spill?

10. What kind of disaster preparation was in place in this community before the oil spill happened?

11. Was this helpful in dealing with the present situation?

12. What problems have come up in the community as a result of the oil spill?

13. Have any problems been resolved as a result of the oil spill? Do you see any good things coming out of this situation?

14. Who or what do you blame for this disaster?

15. Who else do you think I should talk to about this?