OIL SPILL PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTER: ITS ROLE IN THE FLOW OF INFORMATION ON THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL.

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ABSTRACT

On March 24, 1989 the supertanker EXXON VALDEZ struck a submerged rock pinnacle at Bligh Reef, which punctured eight of its storage tanks. Within hours 11 million gallons of crude oil were dumped into the waters of Prince William Sound. The cleanup, damage assessment and restoration activities undertaken for this environmentally complex area presented multi-faceted challenges to organizations, public and private, and various professional disciplines. One of these challenges was to obtain and disseminate pre-spill, spill, and post-spill information to both the private and public sector.

The Oil Spill Public Information Center (OSPIC) was created for this purpose by the Department of Justice on behalf of the Federal Trustees. Its management has since been assumed by the Restoration Team, an arm of the State/Federal Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.

The OSPIC is a public library with a special library focus. Its function is two-pronged: 1) to identify existing information applicable to a spill of this magnitude in a remote, cold water location, consolidate that information and make it accessible in a timely manner; and 2) to collect, organize and make accessible the mountain of information that continues to be generated by state and federal agencies and the private sector as a result of cleanup, damage assessment, and restoration activities.

As a library, the OSPIC serves a variety of patrons, including the oil industry, the oil spill response community, state and federal agencies, the military, scientists, the legal field, business professionals, and teachers and students from kindergarten through graduate school.

This paper focuses on the materials, staff and services
available in the OSPIC. It examines the information needs of the individuals and organizations who use the OSPIC, and the wide variety of perspectives from which the oil industry, the oil spill response community, and state and federal agencies can assist in meeting those needs and benefit in the process.

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