Exxon Valdez Oil Spill
FAQs, Links and Unique Resources at ARLIS

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The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill collection at ARLIS
is the most comprehensive of its kind.

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC) is one of ARLIS’s eight Founding Partners and has entrusted ARLIS with its extensive collection of materials on the Exxon Valdez oil spill (EVOS). Many of the items in this collection are unique and available only at ARLIS.

ARLIS has also acquired EVOS materials representing diverse perspectives from state and federal agencies, universities, the private sector, the media and the general public. Topics include the grounding of the tanker, spill response, cleanup, damage assessment, impacts to the environment and people, research, and restoration.

The collection contains books, reports, maps, photos, documentary films, video footage, and data, in print and digital formats. ARLIS even has works of poetry, novels, children’s books, a theatrical play, and a made-for-TV movie, all pertaining to EVOS.

This guide provides links to numerous full-text publications and many more are available full-text through the ARLIS catalog at www.arlis.org. Most items that are not available digitally may be checked out. ARLIS also loans to other libraries around the world. If you are not located in Anchorage, you may borrow ARLIS materials through your local library. Special collection items are in-library use only.
Contact ARLIS for assistance at 907-27-ARLIS (272-7547) or reference@arlis.org.
Unique Resources at ARLIS

Among the many unique items at ARLIS are:

- Alyeska Emergency Center recordings — audio recording and transcript of excerpts of telephone calls made from 4:57 a.m. on March 24, 1989 to 6:00 a.m. on March 26, 1989 by Exxon and Alyeska officials, including Frank Larossi, Don Cornett, George Nelson and Steve Dietrich.
- DOMS Reports: Alaska Oil Spill Cleanup Support — daily reports from the U.S. Army, Director of Military Support on the military involvement in the spill cleanup.
- EVOS Trustee Council Public Record — an extensive collection that documents the Council’s twenty years of research and restoration work, and contains damage assessment studies, restoration project reports, annual restoration work plans, land appraisals, administrative policies and procedures, budget and financial reports, briefing papers, meeting transcripts, resolutions, public comments, and other materials used in the Council’s decision process. ARLIS also houses the Administrative Records for the 1994 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.
- Exxon Corporation’s bibliography of EVOS related research — citations to 403 scientific journal articles on research funded by Exxon, current to December 15, 2008. Contact ARLIS at reference@arlis.org to request the PDF.
- Exxon Corporation’s publicity materials — brochures, newsletters, and booklets on cleanup operations and environmental impacts.
- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Federal Trial Transcript, 1994, A89-0095 civil.
- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill State Trial Transcript, 1994, 3AN-89-2533 civil.
- Hazelwood Trial Transcript and Exhibits — material from the 1990 trial of Joseph Hazelwood, captain of the T/V Exxon Valdez, including a video recording of closing arguments.
- Sea otter treatment records — Seward Otter Rescue Center files documenting the care of oiled sea otters in 1989, including daily observation logs, diet and medical treatment.
- Shoreline Oiling Evaluations — Surveys conducted from 1989 through 1993 by interagency groups to assess oiling conditions in the spill area; organized by survey, geographic area, and shoreline segment number. Impact maps and summary reports are included.
- Valdez Vessel Traffic Center Radio Transmissions, March 23–24, 1989 — audio recording and transcript, including Captain Joseph Hazelwood’s notification that the tanker had run aground.
- Volume of Oil Spilled, 1990 — a two-volume set of documents containing information about the volume of oil spilled from the Exxon Valdez, including reports and correspondence from Exxon Shipping Company, Caleb Brett U.S.A. Inc, U.S. Coast Guard, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and consulting engineers.
Frequently Asked Questions about the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

Opinions differ on various aspects of the oil spill.
Information from a variety of perspectives and sources is provided wherever possible.
These sources represent a fraction of the materials available at ARLIS.
Contact ARLIS for more information.

How did the Exxon Valdez oil spill happen?
Summary: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Details about the Accident.
Alaska Oil Spill Commission Final Report, Executive Summary.
Alaska Oil Spill Commission Final Report, Appendix A–I, Miscellaneous Reports.
Alaska Oil Spill Commission Final Report, Appendix J–L, Miscellaneous Reports.
Alaska Oil Spill Commission Final Report, Appendix M, Legal Research Reports.
Alaska Oil Spill Commission Final Report, Appendix N, Chronology.
U.S. Coast Guard National Response Team Report to the President, 1989.

Chronology of the spill:
Details: U.S. Coast Guard National Response Team Report to the President, 1989.
Exxon’s Chronology, 1989.

How much oil was spilled?
Sources: Federal On-Scene Coordinator’s Report, U.S. Coast Guard, 1993.
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Questions and Answers.

Total cargo: T/V Exxon Valdez carried 53,094,510 gallons (1,264,155 barrels) of oil.
Amount spilled: 20% of total cargo = 10.8 million gallons = 257,000 barrels = 38,800 metric tonnes
Remaining cargo: 80% of the cargo (44 million gallons) was retained in the tanker and lightered off to
the T/V Exxon Baton Rouge, Exxon San Francisco, and Exxon Baytown. Lightering began March 25, 1989
and was completed April 4, 1989.

How far did the oil spread?
Source: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Questions and Answers.
“Approximately 1,300 miles. 200 miles were heavily or moderately oiled (meaning the impact was
obvious); 1,100 miles were lightly or very lightly oiled (meaning light sheen or occasional tarballs). By
comparison, there is more than 9,000 miles of shoreline in the spill region. From Bligh Reef the spill stretched 460 miles to the tiny village of Chignik on the Alaska Peninsula.”  Map of the spill area.

**What is the spreading property of oil?**


“Because of the properties of oil, a cup of oil can spread a very thin sheen over more than an acre of calm water.”


“Even a pint of oil released onto the water can spread and cover one acre of water surface area and can seriously damage an aquatic habitat.”


“One quart of oil will create an oil slick over two acres in size – the equivalent of nearly three football fields.”


Benjamin Franklin found that a teaspoon of oil poured on the surface of a calm pond spread out to form an oil patch about 1/2-acre in area.

**How many animals died outright from the oil spill?**

Source:  Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Questions and Answers.

“No one knows. The carcasses of more than 35,000 birds and 1,000 sea otters were found after the spill, but since most carcasses sink, this is considered to be a small fraction of the actual death toll. The best estimates are: 250,000 seabirds, 2,800 sea otters, 300 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles, up to 22 killer whales, and billions of salmon and herring eggs.”

**How were the oiled birds and animals cleaned?**

Birds:  International Bird Rescue Research Center, Overview of Bird Search and Rescue: Response Efforts during the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill.


“Washing a sea otter was a very involved process that could take four people over two hours to complete, depending on how badly the otter was oiled... Washing proceeded by wetting the otter with a solution of Dawn® dishwashing detergent mixed with water.”

Click here for video footage of rehabilitated Exxon Valdez sea otters, Nyac, who lived to the age of twenty at the Vancouver Aquarium, and Nuka, who lived to be 21 years old at the Seattle Aquarium. There are now two remaining Exxon Valdez otters.
Is it true that two oiled seals were rehabilitated at a cost of $80,000 each and upon being released into the wild were promptly eaten by a killer whale?

No. This is an urban legend, as explained at Snopes.com. However, it is true that the cost to clean and rehabilitate oiled sea otters was about $80,000 per animal. Source: Monahan, T.P. and A.W. Maki, The Exxon Valdez 1989 Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Program, 1991 International Oil Spill Conference, pages 131-136.

How was the oil cleaned up?


At the peak of cleanup activity in 1989, more than 11,000 workers, 1,400 vessels, and 80 aircraft were involved.


What happened to the oil?


- 20% evaporated and underwent photolysis in the atmosphere
- 50% biodegraded either in situ on beaches or in the water column
- 14% recovered or disposed
- < 1% remained in the water column (except as biodegradation products)
- 2% remained on intertidal shorelines (with a very large proportion of this as highly weathered, biologically inert residuals)
- ~13% remained in subtidal sediments, mostly in the GOA and mostly as highly weathered residuals.

Is oil still out there?

Source: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Lingering Oil.

According to research by NOAA Fisheries researchers at Auke Bay Laboratory, Alaska: 21,000 gallons remain subsurface in the mid- and lower intertidal.


Exxon funded research, Valdez Science.

Exxon funded research, Subsurface Oil Deposits from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill.
**How was the environment restored?**


**What are the current environmental conditions in the spill area?**

Exxon funded research, *Valdez Science.*

ExxonMobil, *Condition of Prince William Sound.*

*Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, *Exxon Valdez Oil Spill: Have WeRecovered?*, 2009, 12 minute film.


NOAA, *Hindsight and Foresight: 20 Years after the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill*, 2009, award-winning documentary.

**How much did the cleanup cost?**


Exxon spent more than $2.5 billion on cleanup costs.

**What was the impact on people living in the spill area?**

Impacts include economic, social, psychological, and health. Details are provided in these reports and DVDs. Contact ARLIS for referrals to scientists, environmental activists, commercial fishers, public process participants, and spill community leaders.

**Reports:**


Fall, J.A. et al., *Update* of the Status of Subsistence Uses in *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Area Communities, 2006.


Picou, J.S. et al., The *Exxon Valdez* Disaster: Readings on a Modern Social Problem, 1999.

**Personal accounts:**

Bushell, S. and S. Jones, Spill: Personal Stories from the *Exxon Valdez* Disaster, 2009 (Interviews done twenty years after the spill include first responders, tanker crew members, Exxon officials, spill area residents and scientists.).

**Documentary films:**


**What were the lessons learned from the spill?**

It has been said that the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill is the most studied oil spill in history. Much has been learned about oil spill prevention, response, cleanup, restoration, and the ecosystem as a result of this spill. In addition to the major reports listed under “How did the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill happen?”, the reports listed below also cover lessons learned.


**What role did the military play in spill response and cleanup?**


**Did Exxon pay any fines?**

Source: *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, *Settlement*.

**Criminal Plea Agreement**

Exxon was fined $150 million, the largest fine ever imposed for an environmental crime. The court forgave $125 million of that fine in recognition of Exxon’s cooperation in cleaning up the spill and paying certain private claims. Of the remaining $25 million, $12 million went to the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund and $13 million went to the national Victims of Crime Fund.

*continued*
**Criminal Restitution**
As restitution for the injuries caused to the fish, wildlife, and lands of the spill region, Exxon agreed to pay $100 million. This money was divided evenly between the federal and state governments.

**Civil Settlement**
Exxon agreed to pay $900 million with annual payments stretched over a 10-year period. The final payment was received in September 2001.

**What is the “reopener”? What is the status of the reopener?**

Source: Exxon Valdez Oil Trustee Council, Reopener documents and press releases.

“At the time of the 1991 settlement, Exxon agreed to pay $900 million with annual payments stretched over a 10-year period. The final payment was received in September 2001. The settlement contained a ‘reopener window’ between September 1, 2002 and September 1, 2006, during which the governments could make a claim for up to an additional $100 million. The funds must be used to restore resources that suffered a substantial loss or decline as a result of the oil spill, the injuries to which could not have been known or anticipated by the six trustees from any information in their possession or reasonably available to any of them at the time of the settlement (September 25, 1991).

“Questions on the current status of the reopener claim should be directed to Andrew Ames, Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division, at 1-202-514-2007 or AskDOJ@usdoj.gov.”


**What about the class action lawsuits against Exxon?**

For a history of the litigation filed by 30,000 commercial fishermen, Alaska Natives, Native corporations, land owners, area businesses, municipalities, cannery workers, processors, and others, see the following:

Exxon Qualified Settlement Fund.

Judge Holland’s Order 364.

Lieff Cabaser, Heiman and Bernstein, Exxon Valdez Litigation: Justice Delayed.

Faegre & Benson, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Litigation Update.

Supreme Court decision on punitive damages, February 27, 2008.

**What is the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council?**

The Trustee Council was formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of a $900 million fund resulting from the settlement of civil litigation in 1991 between the State of Alaska, United States and Exxon Corporation. The Trustee Council consists of three state and three federal trustees. The Council is advised by members of the public and by members of the scientific community. Trustee Council meetings are open to the public.

The EVOS Trustee Council Public Record is housed at ARLIS. This extensive collection documents twenty years of the Council’s work and includes meeting transcripts, policies and procedures, appraisals, annual work plans, final and annual project reports, and other materials used in the Council’s decision process.

ARLIS also houses the public records for the 1994 Restoration Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

For detailed information on EVOSTC restoration projects, go to Restoration Project Search. Search by topic, project number, principle investigator, or project year.

What happened to the tanker?


After the spill, Congress barred the Exxon Valdez from Alaska waters. Exxon renamed the tanker SeaRiver Mediterranean and it hauled Persian Gulf oil to Europe and Asia. In January 2008, ExxonMobil sold the tanker to Hong Kong Bloom Shipping to be converted for hauling bulk ore. It was renamed Dong Fang Ocean.

What happened to Joseph Hazelwood?

Joseph Hazelwood, captain of the T/V Exxon Valdez, was convicted of a misdemeanor charge of negligent discharge of oil, fined $50,000, and sentenced to 1,000 hours of community service, which he served in Anchorage, Alaska at Bean’s Café, a non-profit agency providing meals for the homeless. He has been employed as a maritime consultant and paralegal in New York for the past 15 years.

For an interview with Joseph Hazelwood twenty years after the spill, see pages 27–28 and 279–280 in Spill: Personal Stories from the Exxon Valdez Disaster, by Sharon Bushell and Stan Jones, 2009.


Is it true that a play was written about the spill?

Yes. In 1992, Dick Reichman wrote Tanker on the Rocks: or the Great Alaskan Bad Friday Fish-Spill of '89, The Official Valdez Oil Spill Melodrama. He later went on to write another play, The Big One: a Chronicle of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, which opened in Anchorage in September 2009.

The spill has also been the subject of novels, children’s books, poetry, a movie, music, and a board game. Here are some examples.

Dead Ahead: the Exxon Valdez Disaster, 1993; made-for-TV movie by BBC and aired on HBO Showcase as Disaster at Valdez.


O’Meara, J., ed., Cries from the Heart: Alaskans Respond to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, 1989; poetry, essays and drawings.

Rand, G. and T. Rand, Prince William, 1992; a boy rescues a baby seal hurt by an oil spill and watches it recover at a nearby animal hospital; children’s book.

Robinson, R., Light All Night, 1996; a novel.
**What is the difference between heavy and light crude oil?**


**Where can I get photos or video footage of the oil spill?**

Public domain photos are available at the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council Photo Gallery. ARLIS also has public domain photos and video footage, in addition to published DVDs and videos that may be checked out or borrowed through interlibrary loan. Check the ARLIS catalog at [www.arlis.org](http://www.arlis.org) or contact ARLIS at 907-27-ARLIS (272-7547) or reference@arlis.org.

**Where can I get oil spill materials geared for teachers and students?**

*Exxon Valdez Oil Spill: Resources for Teachers and Students*, March 2009.

This 35-page annotated bibliography is a select list of books, videos and DVDs, websites and articles from a variety of sources pertaining to the Exxon Valdez oil spill and related topics, chosen for their appeal to teachers, students of all ages, and the general public.

**Miscellaneous Facts:**


During 1989 cleanup, Exxon’s primary cleanup contractor, VECO, purchased:

- **Beef** the equivalent of 900 cattle
- **Pork** the equivalent of 500 hogs
- **Poultry** the equivalent of 280,000 chickens and 800 turkeys
- **Milk** enough to fill 24 tanker trucks
- **Total Food** 9.8 million pounds (4,900 tons)
- **Rain suits** 157,000 sets
- **Rubber boots** 65,000 pairs
- **Hard hats** 30,000
- **Coveralls** 125,000 sets
- **Toilet paper** 530 miles, if unrolled.

**Movies and Documentary Films:**


Dead Ahead: the *Exxon Valdez* Disaster, 1993; made-for-TV movie by BBC and aired on HBO Showcase as Disaster at Valdez.

*Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, *Exxon Valdez Oil Spill: Have We Recovered?*, 2009; 12 minute film.


Sources for additional information:

ARLIS Subject Guide: Oil Spills
American Petroleum Institute
ExxonMobil
NOAA, Office of Response and Restoration
Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council

ARLIS Founding Partners

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Bureau of Land Management
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
Fish and Wildlife Service
Minerals Management Service
National Park Service
U.S. Geological Survey
University of Alaska Anchorage

For more information on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, contact:

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