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MAILING ADDRESS:
Commandant
United States Coast Guard

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JOEL D. SIPES

ON THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, POWER AND OFFSHORE ENERGY RESOURCES

22 MARCH 1990

Rear Admiral Joel D. Sipes
Chief, Office of Marine Safety, Security and Environmental Protection
United States Coast Guard

Rear Admiral Joel D. Sipes became Chief, Office of Marine Safety, Security and Environmental Protection in Washington, D.C., in May 1988. He directs a coordinated federal port safety and security program; an active marine environmental protection program; a program for the construction, inspection and certification of merchant vessels; the development of comprehensive marine safety standards; the licensing and certificating of U.S. merchant marine personnel; and represents the U.S. in various related international maritime forums.

Since graduating from the Coast Guard Academy in 1959, RADM Sipes has served in a variety of assignments including the All-Coast Guard Rifle and Pistol Detachment; Deck Watch Officer and Student Engineer on the icebreaker *Eastwind;* Assistant Engineer on the *USCGC Bibb,* and Tactics Officer at the Coast Guard Academy. He compiled and published the text on military leadership used for a number of years in Coast Guard officer training programs.

With more than 29 years of commissioned service, RADM Sipes assignments in the marine safety field included Engineering Inspector at Marine Inspection Office, Baltimore, Maryland; Commanding Officer, Marine Inspection Detachment, Lake Charles, Louisiana; Branch Chief in the Marine Environmental Protection Division at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C.; Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection and Captain of the Port, Corpus Christi, Texas; and Captain of the Port, Houston, Texas. For the past three years, RADM Sipes served on the Eighth Coast Guard District staff as Chief of Operations and Chief of Staff.

RADM Sipes was Executive Assistant to the Commandant from 1981 to 1983. Prior to this, he was graduated from Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) and later served on the Commandant's staff as Special Assistant.

RADM Sipes earned a Masters of Public Administration degree from the University of Rhode Island and was elected to Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society. His decorations include two Meritorious Service Medals, five Coast Guard Commendation Medals, and the Distinguished Marksman Badge.

RADM Sipes was born in Pennsylvania, reared in Alexandria, Virginia. He is married to the former Ruth Ann Gilbert of Wahoo, Nebraska. She is a graduate of the University of Nebraska. They have two children: Stephanie and Jeffrey. In his spare time, RADM Sipes enjoys hunting, fishing, racquetball, jogging and furniture restoration.

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MARCH 22, 1990

GOOD MORNING, MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU TODAY AS WE NEAR THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATION'S WORST OIL SPILL EVER. I HAVE WITH ME TODAY CAPTAIN DAVID ZAWADZKI, THE CHIEF OF STAFF TO REAR ADMIRAL CIANCAGLINI. ADMIRAL CIANCAGLINI IS THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR FOR THE EXXON VALDEZ CLEANUP. THE COMMANDANT, ADMIRAL YOST, SENDS HIS REGARDS FROM VALDEZ, WHERE -- AS WE SPEAK -- HE AND ADMIRAL CIANCAGLINI ARE REVIEWING THE SITUATION.

THE EXXON VALDEZ TRAGEDY HAS CERTAINLY HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON MANY AMERICANS DURING THE PAST YEAR, EVIDENCE OF WHICH IS BEST SEEN IN OUR GREATER AWARENESS OF THE HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH TRANSPORTING OIL IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT. IT HAS ALSO HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON THE MARITIME NATIONS OF THE WORLD. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM A MEETING OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION, WHERE WE HAVE TAKEN UP THE WORK OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON OIL POLLUTION PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE. WITHIN OUR OWN COUNTRY, THIS GREATER AWARENESS EXTENDS NATIONWIDE, AND REACHES FROM CONGRESS -- WHOSE DELIBERATIONS ON OIL SPILL LEGISLATION WE ARE WATCHING WITH GREAT INTEREST -- ALL THE WAY TO OFFICIALS IN THE INDIVIDUAL PORTS.

ONE OF THOSE PORTS, OF COURSE, IS VALDEZ, ALASKA. AND, I KNOW THAT ONE OF YOUR PRIMARY AREAS OF INTEREST FOR TODAY'S HEARING IS THE STATUS OF THE CLEANUP EFFORT THAT HAS BEEN ONGOING IN ALASKA FOR THE LAST YEAR. SINCE THE CLEANUP ACTIVITIES WERE SHIFTED TO THE WINTER OPERATIONS LAST OCTOBER, FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES, AND EXXON PERSONNEL HAVE CLOSELY MONITORED THE SITUATION. IN PARTICULAR, THEY HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE EFFECT OF WINTER WEATHER ON THE CLEANUP AREAS. WHILE THE WEATHER HAS HAD A FAVORABLE EFFECT ON HIGH-ENERGY SHORELINES, IT IS HARD TO SAY AT THIS POINT JUST HOW MUCH OIL REMAINS ALONG SHELTERED SHORELINES, WHICH ARE STILL COVERED BY AS MUCH AS TWO FEET OF SNOW.

CLEANUP ACTIVITIES WILL START AGAIN IN EARNEST IN EARLY APRIL, WHEN COAST GUARD, NOAA, THE STATE OF ALASKA, AND EXXON OFFICIALS WILL CONDUCT A JOINT SURVEY OF SHORELINES. ON THE BASIS OF THAT SURVEY AND EXXON'S GENERAL PLAN, WHICH IS NOW BEING REVIEWED BY THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR, EXXON WILL SUBMIT A SPECIFIC WORK PLAN IN LATE APRIL. WEATHER PERMITTING, ACTUAL CLEANUP OPERATIONS WILL RESUME ABOUT THE FIRST OF MAY.

THE COMMANDANT WILL MAINTAIN HIS STRONG OVERSIGHT ROLE THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS. THE COAST GUARD WILL CONTINUE TO ENSURE THAT THE CLEANUP IS COMPLETED, AS QUICKLY AS THE AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY PERMITS.

WHILE THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF THE VALDEZ SPILL IS APPARENTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO HUMAN ERROR ABOARD THE EXXON VALDEZ, WE HAVE LOOKED CAREFULLY AT THE FINDINGS REVEALED DURING THE POST-CASUALTY INVESTIGATION. FIRST, WE HAVE INSTITUTED IMPROVEMENTS AT THE COAST GUARD VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICE, OR VTS. WE ADDED THREE PEOPLE TO THE

VTS's COMPLEMENT TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL SUPERVISORY WATCHSTANDER AROUND THE CLOCK. WE ARE ALSO CONTINUOUSLY PLOTTING THE PROGRESS OF ALL TANKERS TRANSITING THE VTS VALDEZ COVERAGE AREA. WE ARE IMPROVING OUR FOUL WEATHER SURVEILLANCE CAPABILITY BY INSTALLING AN ALL-WEATHER RADAR AT THE POTATO POINT SITE. WE ARE ALSO INSTALLING AUTOMATIC PLOTTING EQUIPMENT TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE VTS OPERATION. FINALLY, THE ENTIRE VTS MICROWAVE RELAY SYSTEM IS BEING REPLACED.

THE COAST GUARD IS ALSO UNDERTAKING AN IMPROVEMENT TO THE SHORT RANGE AIDS TO NAVIGATION SYSTEM IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND. A MAJOR LIGHT WILL BE ERECTED ON BLIGH REEF IN ORDER TO PROVIDE MORE REDUNDANCY TO THE SYSTEM OF VISUAL WARNINGS FOR THE MARINER.

THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY HAS MADE STRIDES IN ITS ABILITY TO RESPOND TO SPILLS IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND. IN THE WAKE OF THE EXXON VALDEZ SPILL, THE ALYESKA TERMINAL IN VALDEZ INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF RESPONSE EQUIPMENT AND PERSONNEL AND INSTITUTED ADDITIONAL PREPAREDNESS MEASURES. CURRENTLY ALL TANKSHIPS ARE ESCORTED THROUGH PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND BY A TUG AND ONE OF FOUR FULLY EQUIPPED RESPONSE VESSELS. THEY HAVE ALSO PURCHASED A LARGE SKIMMING VESSEL, NUMEROUS SMALL SKIMMERS, A LIGHTERING VESSEL, TWO STORAGE BARGES, AND OVER 23,000 FEET OF CONTAINMENT BOOM. 2600 FEET OF FIREPROOF BOOM IS ALSO ON HAND. DISPERSANT APPLICATION EQUIPMENT IS ON STANDBY IN ANCHORAGE. ALL OF THIS EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN ORDERED AND MOST IS ALREADY IN PLACE IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND.

THE REST OF THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY IS BEGINNING TO SHOW SIMILAR IMPROVEMENTS. THE AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE HAS CONDUCTED A CRITICAL REVIEW OF INDUSTRY'S ROLE IN SPILL RESPONSE.

THEIR MOST SIGNIFICANT RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL INDUSTRY CAPABILITY, ESPECIALLY IN THE OFFSHORE AREAS. THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY RESPONSE ORGANIZATION (PIRO) IS CURRENTLY BEING DEVELOPED TO MEET THAT NEED. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH PIRO TO ASSURE THAT IT HAS THE NECESSARY CAPACITY FOR TIMELY, EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO SPELLS. INDUSTRY HAS ALSO RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND SPILL RESPONSE EXERCISES. THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF RESPONSE ORGANIZATIONS -- INCLUDING GOVERNMENTAL, INDUSTRY, EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURERS, CLEANUP CONTRACTORS -- ARE DISPLAYING A RENEWED INTEREST IN SPILL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE. NEW INITIATIVES ARE UNDERWAY, AND NEW EQUIPMENT IS BEING RESEARCHED AND PROCURED.

IN CLOSING, I SEE A NATIONAL EFFORT TO INCORPORATE THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EXXON VALDEZ. SOME PARTICULAR ITEMS, SUCH AS REVISED COAST GUARD CONTINGENCY PLANS, HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATED BY MORE THAN ADEQUATE RESPONSES TO SPILLS IN NEW YORK AND OFF THE CALIFORNIA COAST. THE COAST GUARD IS INSTALLING BETTER EQUIPMENT, INSTITUTING NEW PROCEDURES, AND INCREASING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. MORE COMPREHENSIVE PROPOSALS, SUCH AS DOUBLE BOTTOMS, DOUBLE HULLS, AND NATIONWIDE VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICE NEEDS, ARE BEING CAREFULLY STUDIED. OTHERS, SUCH AS BUILDING SKIMMING CAPABILITY INTO NEW COAST GUARD BUOY TENDERS ARE BEING CONSIDERED.

THE COMMANDANT AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN, AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, TO MAKE THIS NATIONAL EFFORT A TRULY EFFECTIVE ONE.