



Environment

Office of the Deputy Minister

Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

May 15, 2014

Tanker Safety Expert Panel on Phase II Review

Tsep-cesnc@tc.gc.ca

Dear Panel Members:

RE: Tanker Ship-Source Spill Preparedness and Response Requirements in the Arctic

Thank you for your email and letter of March 25, 2014 concerning tanker ship-source spill preparedness and response in the Arctic (phase II). We appreciate the work of the Panel in preparing the Phase I report that focussed on preparedness and response south of 60°, and welcome your phase II work. The findings and recommendations of the Phase I report provide a helpful basis for considering the distinctive conditions and needs associated with operations in the Arctic.

As noted in your Lines of Inquiry paper, your focus, and our comments below, pertain to ship-source oil spills and releases of hazardous and noxious substances, and do not include comments pertaining to oil and gas exploration or drilling. As these topics overlap, we note that Yukon government provided comments in March 2011 to the National Energy Board concerning its Arctic offshore drilling review (attached). Overall, Yukon is committed to responsible resource development in the Beaufort Sea while ensuring safety and environmental and socio-cultural integrity in the region.

The following response includes input from several Yukon departments, including Environment; Energy, Mines and Resources; Community Services; Executive Council Office, and; Highways and Public Works.

Arctic Environment

Yukon has over 300 km of sensitive coastline that includes Ivvavik National Park and Herschel Island Territorial Park. The coast is characterized by expansive, low-lying tidal flats and numerous river deltas that are home to a rich abundance of marine and terrestrial fish and wildlife. Access in these areas is very difficult, making timely and effective response to spills extremely challenging, hence the overriding importance of prevention.

The vast and remote nature of the region, the long distances to communities, cold climate, darkness and fragility of ecosystems are key factors for considerations in planning effective response systems.

Prevention

Prevention is critically important. This should include clear regulatory requirements and standards. Using proven mitigation techniques is important to reduce the uncertainties associated with using different methods in different environments. This may necessitate research and development programs to test mitigation measures that are suitable for cold climate circumstances and low-lying tidal environments.

Existing Response Capacities

There are no facilities in place in the region to treat or dispose of oil or hazardous materials, nor are there any existing capabilities to treat wildlife that would be affected by such incidents.

Preparedness and Response

The very small and disparate population base over such an expansive region indicates a significant challenge for preparedness and response. Notwithstanding this, there is a need to provide training for local and regional personnel in communities and at different levels of governments.

In terms of access to the Arctic, both to pre-place equipment and to respond to any emergency, Yukon's Dempster Highway provides a vital link as Canada's only road access to the Arctic Ocean.

Roles, Responsibilities and Legal Framework

Federal departments have the principal responsibility for spill response. Notwithstanding the role of the private sector (as noted in your Phase I report), there is a need for federal oversight to ensure appropriate regulations and standards are in place, monitored and enforced.


There is a role for territorial and First Nation governments and local communities in providing local knowledge. This could occur as part of ongoing monitoring of activities (e.g., some northern communities have community-based monitoring programs that could be helpful in detecting spills) and also during response. Training to enhance preparedness and response would be important, as part of the private sector and federal initiatives.

Research and Development

As noted above, the use of proven mitigation techniques is important. This may necessitate research and development programs to develop and test mitigation measures that are suitable for cold climate circumstances and low-lying tidal environments. The Yukon College Cold Climate Innovation program is focused on the development, commercialization and export of cold climate technologies and solutions for subarctic regions around the world. The centre supports the partnership between applied scientific researchers, industry and government dedicated to addressing cold climate issues affecting northerners. We recommend that facilities such as Yukon College Cold Climate Innovation program be engaged to provide such research.

We appreciate the efforts of the panel thus far, and look forward to the results of your Phase II work. Should you require any follow-up, please contact Dan Paleczny, Director of Policy, Planning and Aboriginal Relations (email: dan.paleczny@gov.yk.ca; 867-667-3028).

Sincerely,



Kelvin Leary
Deputy Minister of Environment

Attachment

cc: Shirley Abercrombie, A/Deputy Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources
Joe MacGillivray, Deputy Minister, Executive Council Office
Mike Johnson, Deputy Minister, Highways and Public Works
Harvey Brooks, Deputy Minister, Community Services