



Grace Merkes, representing the
Kenai Peninsula Borough

Update from the Board of Directors

Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council

Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC) met for their yearly meeting in Anchorage on November 30th and December 1st.

Thursday, members of the Council and staff toured the Municipality of Anchorage's Emergency Operations Center. Office of Emergency Management Director Amanda Loach, Planning Programs Manager Sean MacKenzie, and Response Programs Manager Andy Preis gave a presentation about the city's response to the 2018 earthquake and the changes made in planning and response strategies following that event. The team also gave an update on the state's tsunami maps and other warning criteria, followed by a tour of the working facility. We appreciate the opportunity to meet and dialogue with response leaders throughout our area of concern and thank the team at Anchorage OEM for their time.

Friday the full Council held its regular meeting at the BP Energy Center. Kara Kusche, Prevention and Technical Support Section Manager for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's (ADEC) Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) Division presented to the Council. ADEC has updated some internal policies, like adopting e-signing and Kusche noted recent adoption of updated financial responsibility regulations. The Council also received a Department staffing update. A number of program directors and managers in key leadership roles have left the Department recently and while we trust that ADEC is making every effort to fill those positions with qualified personnel in an expedient manner, we remain concerned about the state's ability to respond to a large-scale incident in the face of this continued staff turnover issue.

On the Federal side, we heard a presentation from Capt. John Cole, United States Coast Guard, who gave an operational update on the Coast Guard's Arctic Shield 2023 program that included a response exercise in the Bering Sea. Capt. Cole also talked about the Coast Guard's plans to enhance its response capabilities in 2024 while noting that USCG staff continue handling more search and rescue and medical evacuations in rural Alaska.

We also heard a presentation from Captain Jeff Brue, Global Marine Operations Manager for Marathon Petroleum. We appreciate Marathon's continued commitment to operational safety in Cook Inlet, as highlighted by its positive partnerships with both other industry operators and the region's response community.

The Council also thanks our colleagues at Prince William Sound RCAC for hosting our board members and staff at its annual Science Night and Holiday party.

The Council is scheduled to meet next April in Kenai.