

Here is the original press commentary on the Alaska Risk Assessment and the Resignation of ADEC emergency response coordinator Ed Meggert, published July 22, 2009, along with some of the subsequent news articles and commentary on the same subject.

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (Community Perspective) – July 22, 2009

Accessed July 24, 2009 at <http://www.newsminer.com/news/2009/jul/22/states-oil-review-stalls/?opinion>



COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

State's oil review stalls

Richard Fineberg

Published Wednesday, July 22, 2009

Two years ago, Gov. Sarah Palin proudly proclaimed she was launching a comprehensive risk assessment of Alaska's oil and gas infrastructure. Described as "a thorough, independent appraisal," the project would "identify facilities and systems that pose the greatest risk of failure, along with measures to reduce risks."

Describing the project, which would cost \$5 million and take two to three years to complete, Gov. Palin said, "no such system-wide risk assessment has ever been conducted on this complex system."

Two years later, as Gov. Palin leaves office early, the risk assessment project is in shambles.

The project was to begin this summer, with a final report to be completed by June 1, 2010. With more than \$1.3 million spent, implementation has not begun. Two weeks ago, Ira Rosen, the project manager for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, told me the project is temporarily on hold — primarily because the state has been unable to secure the cooperation of the petroleum industry.

More than a dozen environmental groups and concerned citizens (this writer included) recommended that DEC terminate the project. Public criticism centered on factors such as:

- excessive reliance on statistical data;
- inadequate field review to assure data accuracy and relevance;
- failure to secure access to either necessary data or petroleum facilities;
- focus on major catastrophic events, to the exclusion of smaller issues;

- failure to establish clear definitions and criteria for evaluating potential hazards;
- inadequate attention to management principles and practices;

Observers such as Walter B. Parker questioned whether the project contractors — Doyon Emerald and ABS consulting groups — were sufficiently independent of the petroleum systems owners and operators.

What has Gov. Palin said about the apparent demise of the project she insouciantly initiated two years ago? Nothing.

As I observed while consulting for the Palin administration on petroleum taxes, Palin displays little interest in what state agencies actually do.

If Palin had paid attention to how DEC operates, she might have discovered another troubling situation at the department.

For many years, Ed Meggert has led DEC's Fairbanks-based emergency field response team, which covers the largest area of the state. Meggert led the state response to the 2001 bullet hole spill on the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, the 2006 North Slope corrosion spill and many other events, including the response to that mysterious blob that showed up in the Chukchi Sea recently.

In May, Meggert led response teams that dealt with toxic wastes released by the floods that tore through villages on the Yukon, Kuskokwim and other northern rivers. Palin visited flood sites, used Twitter to praise the emergency responders and encourage volunteer support for beleaguered communities.

Meggert, working as DEC's lead emergency responder, was not as happy. In his view, the dysfunctional DEC bureaucracy failed to provide the personnel, training and logistical support necessary for effective response, exposing his staff to needless risks.

"I will not send staff into a potentially dangerous situation again without proper support," Meggert wrote in a June 16 complaint to his superiors. Several weeks later, Meggert resigned after 20 years of state service. His resignation letter concluded:

"As one of our managers has stated on several occasions, 'It doesn't matter whether we do a good job as long as we look good.' I was not raised that way. I have not lived that way. And I no longer wish to be associated with an agency that thinks and acts that way."

These DEC developments demonstrate that Palin, as governor, utterly failed to walk her talk.

Veteran petroleum analyst Richard A. Fineberg, of Ester, evaluated the Alaska oil and gas risk assessment project for environmental organizations.

KUAC (Fairbanks) Radio – Stories for Thursday, July 23rd, 2009

Transcribed July 29, 2009 from

<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/kuac/news.newsmain/article/1/0/1533829/KUAC.Local.News/NewsCast.Thurs.72309>

Dan Bross (Reporter): The state is weighing how to move forward with an oil and gas risk assessment. The Palin Administration project was initiated in 2007 in response to corrosion caused spills at Prudhoe Bay but a contractor-devised methodology is drawing criticism. Long-time oil industry analyst Richard Fineberg says two years and over a million dollars have been spent on an unreliable, data-driven strategy.

Richard Fineberg: They don't have access to the data they need to assure that it's real and they don't have access to the facilities to see what condition they're in, and the project should be boots on the ground looking at the facilities, not streams of computer data somewhere.

Bross: Fineberg and others are also critical of the project's narrowed scope. Long-time Department of Environmental Conservation on-scene coordinator Ed Meggert says the entire focus is now on infrastructure components.

Ed Meggert: Initially it had three elements. One was looking at the actual structure itself – the infrastructure, the physical side. Then it looked at the process safety – okay, what sort of programs did the industry have in place to guarantee integrity? And the third was government oversight of that process. Somewhere along the line, the last two got taken out.

Bross: State project manager Ira Rosen says analysis of industry and government oversight still fit into the assessment. He says the Department of Natural Resources is separately looking at government regulation and industry oversight is indirectly incorporated into the state assessment. Rosen says the state has not renewed a contract with the Doyon subsidiary that developed the proposed methodology and will look for another company to take over. He says the state is taking public comment and feedback from the National Academy of Sciences before deciding how to move forward. The assessment is due out a year from now. Rosen says the project is expected to stay within the \$5 million budget provided by the state Legislature.

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (News Article) – July 30, 2009

[Note: This article was picked up by the Associated Press and appeared in other state newspapers, including the Anchorage Daily News and the Juneau Empire.]

Accessed July 31, 2009 at <http://newsminer.com/news/2009/jul/30/department-environmental-conservation-quits-citing/>



Alaska DEC official quits, citing ‘miserable’ spill response to Yukon flooding

By Rena Delbridge
Published Thursday, July 30, 2009

FAIRBANKS — The state’s leader for spill response has quit his job because of shortcomings and safety concerns he encountered during Yukon River spring flooding.

Ed Meggert said that while most of the Department of Environmental Conservation divisions handled matters well, his unit — the Division of Spill Prevention and Response — failed internally.

Commissioner Larry Hartig said his department came through well for communities affected by the spring ice jams and flooding and he appreciates the job Meggert has done for DEC. He also said Meggert’s concerns will be investigated and acted upon if warranted.

“Whether Ed or somebody else comes forward with concerns, we’re certainly going to take those to heart,” Hartig said. “I do want to look into the specifics. If we see areas where we could do better, we are going to follow up on those.”

The unprecedented flooding and ice jams toppled diesel tanks and sent fuel containers and spilled material into the Yukon, leaving iridescent puddles of oil in village streets. DEC’s spill response team, which Meggert leads, was on the scene in Eagle within a few days of the main flood and traveled to other villages up and down the Yukon as water drove destruction downriver. Other DEC divisions, including solid waste and drinking water, responded as well.

“Other sections of DEC did very well, but the spill response group was miserable,” Meggert said. “The system absolutely broke down, and the worst part of it was the money situation.”

Channels to tap into emergency funds and cut deals with contractors more or less closed, he said. Meggert was challenged to convince people in DEC that an

emergency existed, yet he's authorized to push the responders into emergency mode as incident commander.

Those in charge of opening funds "did nothing but throw roadblocks up," Meggert said.

"Everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong," Meggert said. "Nobody else viewed this as a disaster, except us (Meggert and another employee). I've been through numerous floods, the earthquake. I have done this before, and I have never seen a cluster like this before."

Assembling an incident command team as per regulation, Meggert found only one employee willing to help. He was forced to send a new employee with a week of initial training to go out into the field alone. No one was available to help with logistics, supplies, environmental issues or contracting.

At one point, DEC failed to pay a Fairbanks contractor its full bill, Meggert said. He covered the \$6,000 gap out of his own pocket, an expenditure which might not be reimbursed by the state.

Meggert joined DEC in 1995 and has worked spill response for numerous floods and an earthquake.

Lack of internal support is one thing, but Meggert said the final blow was a concern for DEC staff working under him.

"I sent them out individually to dangerous situations, for which I'm personally liable, and then I had them working for no money," he said. "I did it because it had to be done. People were out of their homes. But I won't do it again. I can't afford to take those chances, nor will I do it to the people I work with."

"It was very important to this department and all the rest of the departments in the state that we really help the communities out there in a challenging situation, and as we do that, to make sure our people are safe on the ground," Hartig said. "Overall, I was very proud of the job DEC and the other agencies did."

In particular, he plans to look into funding sources and channels during emergency situations.

Meggert said he hopes Hartig, whom he labels a fair and good commissioner, does just that.

"We managed to get it (the response) done," Meggert said. "People were pretty happy."

He will retire effective July 31.

Anchorage Daily News (Editorial) – August 1, 2009

Accessed Aug. 1, 2009 at <http://www.adn.com/opinion/view/story/884868.html>



Our view: Nuts & bolts

Details of state government could use more attention

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The man who coordinated the state's response to the environmental fallout from this year's spring floods has resigned. Ed Meggert was frustrated because bureaucratic issues made the oil spill response slow and disorganized. Earlier this summer, the federal government told the state to stop taking new clients in programs that supply home care attendants for people with disabilities and intensive medical needs. The feds took that drastic step because state oversight of the program was so inept.

Well past the Fourth of July, the winter's accumulation of sand and gravel along state-maintained roadways and sidewalks in Anchorage still had not been swept up. The state contracted out the job and botched it. A new, underequipped contractor severely underbid the job, and work lagged because the contract had no benchmarks to ensure timely progress.

Three different state departments, all with a similar problem: They have trouble performing a fairly basic task.

The work falls within obscure or boring areas of government that Alaskans just assume will be take care of properly. Making sure routine government tasks like these are done is part of a governor's job.

But in politics, there are what's known as "show horses" and "work horses." The former are quick to send out press releases or rush in front of TV cameras, but they disdain the hard work required to master issues and achieve results through the political process. "Work horses" are less interested in grabbing the limelight and know how to get things done.

By all accounts, newly installed Gov. Sean Parnell is a work horse, eager to attend to the details of state government.

That will be a welcome change.

BOTTOM LINE: Some parts of state government will benefit from the attention of a hands-on governor.

Juneau Empire (“My Turn”) – August 4, 2009

Accessed Aug. 12, 2009 at http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/080409/opi_476223119.shtml



Tuesday, August 4, 2008
Story last updated at 8/4/2009 – 10:03 a.m.

My Turn: DEC developments show Palin did not walk her talk

By Richard A. Fineberg | *My Turn*

"I promised that we would protect this beautiful environment while safely and ethically developing resources, and we did. We built a petroleum oversight office and a subcabinet to study climate conditions," former Gov. Sarah Palin proclaimed at her farewell address in Fairbanks July 26.

But recent developments at the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation sully her claim.

In May 2007, Palin proudly launched an oil and gas infrastructure review slated to cost \$5 million and take two to three years to complete. The Alaska Risk Assessment project was to be "a thorough, independent appraisal" that would "identify facilities and systems that pose the greatest risk of failure, along with measures to reduce risks."

Two years later, the ARA project is in shambles. According to DEC project manager Ira Rosen, the project is temporarily at "full stop," primarily because the state has not been able to secure industry cooperation in providing the necessary information. After spending more than \$1.3 million, DEC pulled the ARA contractors off the job when the project plan was resoundingly denounced during the public comment period that ended June 2.

After reviewing the proposed methodology, more than a dozen environmental groups and concerned citizens (this writer included) recommended that DEC terminate the project for a variety of reasons that included:

- excessive reliance on statistical data;
- inadequate field review to assure data accuracy and relevance;
- failure to secure access to either the necessary data or the petroleum facilities;

- focus on major catastrophic events, to the exclusion of consideration of chronic pollution and lesser safety problems;
- failure to establish clear definitions and criteria for evaluating potential hazards;
- inadequate attention to management principles and practices; and
- narrowing of project requirements to exclude recommendations by the project contractor and evaluation of the adequacy of government oversight.

As governor, Palin ignored other DEC problems. For example, when Alaska's annual ice jams broke with unusual force last May, the governor visited flood sites and was effusive in her praise of agency performance. But the man who ran the field response for DEC's Fairbanks office begs to differ.

For more than a decade, Ed Meggert headed DEC's northern region emergency field response team, which covers by far the largest area of the state. Meggert was pleased with his team's field performance but also had serious problems with the way the agency's home office handled the spring emergency. In Meggert's view, a bloated and dysfunctional bureaucracy failed to provide the field personnel, training and logistical support necessary to deal with the emergency in a timely manner.

"We did a good job," he said.

But with too many responders in desk jobs and too few in the field, as the floods rolled downriver both personnel and resources were lacking. Consequently, he was forced to dispatch responders to remote locations alone, when his training and experience told him the personnel for whom he was responsible should have been working in teams to assure their safety.

In a June 16 memorandum, Meggert took the problem up with his superiors.

"I will not send staff into potentially dangerous situation again without proper support," Meggert declared. He noted that when he asked his home office for immediate assistance, the response was slow because the managers were out, observing an oil spill training exercise. Meggert wanted to know: How could the DEC home office emergency response support desk be left unattended? To assure more effective response in the future, he requested immediate correction of this problem.

Several weeks later, dissatisfied with his agency's response, Meggert resigned after 20 years in state service. His farewell letter concluded:

"As one of our managers has stated on several occasions, 'It doesn't matter whether we do a good job as long as we look good'. I was not raised that way. I have not lived that way. And I no longer wish to be associated with an agency that thinks and acts that way."

It is one thing to Twitter and make speeches; it is another to govern effectively. The latter requires follow-through to insure performance. DEC's problems is emblematic of Palin's striking failure, as governor, to walk her talk.

- Oil and gas analyst Richard A. Fineberg of Ester evaluated the Alaska Risk Assessment project for environmental organizations. During the past 35 years, he has observed Alaska oil and gas development as a newspaper reporter, as a consultant to various local, state and federal agencies, as a senior oil and gas policy advisor to the governor of Alaska (during the late 1980's), as an aide to Gov. Sarah Palin on petroleum production tax legislation in 2007 and as a commentator at www.finebergresearch.com.

Anchorage Daily News (Compass) – August 6, 2009

Accessed Aug. 6, 2009 at <http://www.adn.com/opinion/compass/story/889260.html>

adn.com
Anchorage Daily News

Governing failed in emergency response **COMPASS: Other points of view**

By RICHARD FINEBERG

(08/05/09 19:21:25)

"I promised that we would protect this beautiful environment while safely and ethically developing resources, and we did," former Gov. Sarah Palin proclaimed at her farewell address July 26, citing creation of two new bureaucratic organizations.

Recent developments at the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) tell a different story.

In May 2007 the governor proudly proclaimed she was launching a comprehensive risk assessment of Alaska's oil and gas infrastructure. The Alaska Risk Assessment (ARA), which would cost \$5 million and take two to three years to complete, would be "a thorough, independent appraisal" that would "identify facilities and systems that pose the greatest risk of failure, along with measures to reduce risks."

As Sarah Palin leaves office, the risk assessment is in shambles. According to DEC project manager Ira Rosen, the project is temporarily at a "full stop," primarily because the state has been unable to secure the cooperation of the petroleum industry to provide the necessary information. Rosen also confirmed that DEC pulled the contractors off the job after the project plan was resoundingly denounced during the public comment period that ended June 2.

After reviewing the proposed methodology, more than a dozen environmental groups and informed citizens (this writer included) recommended that DEC terminate the project because the risk assessment's original intent had been severely watered down. They felt the proposal would generate meaningless statistical results due to failure to focus on the condition of field facilities, the implementation of management practices and the adequacy of government oversight.

The risk assessment is just one example of a DEC problem that Gov. Palin has ignored. In May of this year, as Alaska's annual ice jams broke with unusual force, then-Gov. Palin visited flood sites and was effusive in her praise of agency response to the spring flooding. But Ed Meggert, the man who ran the field response for DEC's Fairbanks office for more than a decade, begs to differ.

Although Meggert was pleased with his team's field performance, he also had serious problems with the way the agency's home office handled the spring emergency. In

Meggert's view, a bloated and dysfunctional bureaucracy failed to provide the field personnel, training and logistical support necessary to deal with the emergency in a timely manner.

"We did a good job," he said, "but we struggled." With too many deskbound responders and too few in the field, on more than one occasion he was forced to dispatch responders to operate solo in remote locations, when his training and experience told him the personnel for whom he was responsible should have been working in teams to assure their safety.

In a June 16 memorandum, Meggert took the problem up with his superiors. "I will not send staff into potentially dangerous situation again without proper support," Meggert declared.

He noted that when he asked his home office for immediate assistance as the floods rolled downriver, response was slow because the managers were elsewhere, observing an oil spill training exercise. Meggert wanted to know: How could the emergency response support desk be left unattended? To assure more effective response in the future, he requested immediate correction of this problem.

Dissatisfied with his agency's response, Meggert has served notice that he is retiring after 20 years in state service. His resignation letter concluded:

"As one of our managers has stated on several occasions, 'It doesn't matter whether we do a good job as long as we look good.' I was not raised that way. I have not lived that way. And I no longer wish to be associated with an agency that thinks and acts that way."

These two recent developments show: It is one thing to twitter and make speeches; it is another to govern effectively.

Veteran oil and gas analyst Richard A. Fineberg of Ester evaluated the Alaska Risk Assessment project for environmental organizations.