

## “We Watched Our Friends Die”

### Change Oil Spill Response Global Alliance-Alaskan Delegation Challenges EPA/Federal Regulators

**May 22, 2013, Valdez, Alaska**--The words of an Alaskan tribal elder, “*We watched our family and friends die,*” represent the tearful feelings of many about the use of chemical dispersants in their waters. Used by workers during the Exxon Valdez oil spill cleanup and more recently on the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Corexit dispersants brought severe illness and early death to many of their relatives working to save their life-supporting ecosystems according to documentation in a formal submission compiled by an Alaskan *Change Oil Spill Response Alliance Delegation* presenting at the *Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT)* semi-annual meeting today.

Despite mounting opposition, the ARRT consisting of federal and state agency officials responsible for protecting and safeguarding Alaskan lands and waters, is ready to give the green light to Corexit/chemical dispersant preauthorization plans presented at their 22 May meeting in Valdez, Alaska. The *Alliance Delegation* submitted a formal demand to completely eliminate dispersant use in the ARRT Unified Plan and to enact an alternative plan requesting immediate preauthorization of a ‘Bioremediation Agent--Enzyme Additive Type’ non-toxic oil spill cleanup technology to replace their chemical methods.

The lobby and federal emergency response planners asking for ‘dispersant preauthorization’ apparently continue to discount the track record of toxic environmental impacts lingering twenty-four years after *Exxon Valdez* and three years after BP’s deepwater drilling spill in the Gulf. One wonders ‘why?’ and how, seemingly ignoring scientific studies consistently revealing the long-term, lethal effects of chemical dispersants used in oil spill response<sup>1</sup>.

Citing the statutory rights of federally recognized tribes over the management of Alaskan natural resources as equal to the powers of federal agency trustees, the formal request cautioned officials stating: “*It is clear that the pre-authorization, advocacy of, or continued use of chemical dispersants in Alaskan waters—given the significant number of scientific studies showing negative human health, wildlife, natural resources and other environmental impacts—would constitute a willful and conscious act of environmental harm and, in some instances, damages and lethal harm to human life residing within or near said waters....Anyone serving on the ARRT could be held culpable because, after all, it doesn’t come down to ‘government’ making the decision, it comes down to individuals who assess the data and make the decisions.*”

The Alaska Inter-tribal Council’s (AITC) ARRT seat was abruptly retracted in 2008, which has effectively removed tribal trustee involvement. Over the past several weeks, fearing the vote of approval for dispersant plans, Alaskan tribes led by the (AITC) began enacting statewide, legally binding tribal resolutions opposing the use of chemical dispersant substances in oil spill contingency planning throughout Alaska. With more than 200 indigenous tribes living in remote wilderness with no direct representation at the ARRT table, a decision to apply chemical

dispersants to mitigate oil spills has untenable trade-offs impacting their fisheries and polluting their food and water sources.

While this feud with federal agencies has been going on for years, the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council requested the assistance of the internationally renowned conservation group, the Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization (LAEO), whose founder is famed for entering war zones to save human and animal life from certain death. Carrying their Change Oil Spill Response Now mantra *“The delicate balance and way of life for the indigenous peoples of Alaska is, in essence under threat of extinction. We are offering a solution that makes it possible for industry, federal agencies, and the tribes to move forward in a way that all three groups can prosper and win,”* said Barbara Wiseman, LAEO International President heading up the Alliance. The newly-formed regional partnership for Alaska—part of LAEO’s [\*Change Oil Spill Response\*](#) (COSR) *Global Alliance* initiative is headquartered at [www.protectmarinelifenow.org](http://www.protectmarinelifenow.org)

A pivotal document included in the *Alliance* submission is a 44-page position paper released last month, by LAEO’s Science and Technology Advisory Board outlining an entirely new approach to oil spill problems associated with drilling, transport, pipelines, and storage mishaps, entitled; [\*A Call for a Twenty-First-Century SOLUTION in Oil Spill Response\*](#)

The AITC coalition of Alaskan tribal representatives and groups also delivered 18 Tribal Council resolutions to the committee co-chairs: Mr. Mark Everett, U.S. Coast Guard, and Chris Field, EPA Coordinator. *“Instead of just protesting and saying ‘no’, we will participate in the policy making process and offer constructive solutions to the problems oil spill response agency authorities face in this region. Not only are we asking them to disapprove the preauthorization of dispersants in our waters, but we want more effective spill response plans and are bringing a solution to the table to replace their dependency on these toxic dispersants”*, said Nikos Pastos, Environmental Sociologist and now acting spokesperson for COSR Alliance delegation.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.whistleblower.org/program-areas/public-health/corexit/>;  
[www.protectmarinelifenow.org](http://www.protectmarinelifenow.org); <http://www.wwtv.com/news/Some-oil-spill-cleanup-workers-say-exposure-to-chemicals-left-them-sick-207820271.html>

**For More Information:**

**Alaska-Change Oil Spill Response Alliance Delegation:**

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Barbara Wiseman:	(818) 769-3410 International President, Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization (LAEO)
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ATTACHMENT: STATEMENTS FROM SCIENTISTS AND PROFESSIONALS – ALLIANCE MEMBERS:

**Chief Michael Stickman of Nulato, International Chair of the [Arctic Athabaskan Council](#) and a leading member of a newly established Arctic Council task force working to substantially improve procedures for combating oil spills in the Arctic, endorsed the alliance formation, stating: “Committing to clean up oil spills after they happen is insufficient. Precaution and nation-to-nation Tribal Government Consultation and free prior informed consent must be enacted before hasty implementation of a policy of preauthorizing toxic chemical dispersant substances in oil spill contingency planning. Why have less toxic bioremediation methods with a 20-year track record of effectiveness been ignored by the Alaska interagency Regional Response Team?”**

*"Our waters, fish, peoples, wildlife, and productivity of subsistence resources are threatened by imminent oil spills in harsh Arctic conditions; the government pre-authorizing toxic chemical dispersants adds to the toxicity in the water column after an accidental release of hazardous oil, and the intentional use of chemical dispersant substances is a malicious action threatening to harm subsistence use of the environment for future generations."* **Carl Wassilie, Yupiaq Biologist with Alaska’s Big Village Network.**

*“Committing to clean up oil spills after they happen is insufficient. Precaution and nation to nation Tribal Government Consultation and free, prior, informed consent **must** be enacted before hasty implementation of a policy of pre-authorizing toxic chemical dispersant substances in oil spill contingency planning. Why have less toxic bioremediation methods with a 20-year track record of effectiveness been ignored by the Alaska inter-agency Regional Response Team? Prevention of the potential of oil pollution in the Arctic marine environment is crucial for Tribal Governments in Alaska and throughout the Arctic. The Nuuk Declaration established a task force to develop, and I’m quoting: “an international instrument on Arctic marine oil pollution preparedness and response...” The Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council have discussed this at length. We are aware of the prospect of a blow out or major tanker accident. “Chief Michael Stickman of Nulato–International Chair of the Arctic Athabaskan Council*

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*“Federal pre-authorization of toxic chemical dispersants coupled with the State of Alaska’s legally questionable water right permitting process could only be seen as a bold attack on the rights of citizens and Tribes to protect inherent sovereign pre-existing and human water rights throughout Alaska.”* - **Hal Shepherd Executive Director Center for Water Advocacy**

*“Altitude, vegetation, good climate and rich soils have combined to contribute to the development of subsistence livelihood as the most vibrant sector of the economy and the sector from which most of the Alaskan population derives their sustenance, nourishment and means of support for their families and communities. “ There is no need or purpose for pre-authorizing the use of toxic chemicals where we harvest our foods!”* - **Emily Murray Norton Bay Inter-Tribal Watershed Council**

*“Pre-Authorizing Chemical Dispersants in oil spill contingency planning anywhere within Alaska is unconstitutional and legally questionable. Our Tribal indigenous rights in Alaska to fish are protected like in no other State Constitution. The first consideration for the waters of the lakes, the rivers and oceans are to be reserved to protect and promote healthy fisheries, forever. Fisheries and wildlife are considered to be of esthetic, ecological. Educational, historical, recreational, scientific value to the Nation and its peoples, and our peoples have rights of first in time and first in line to the resources we use and hold with spiritual, cultural and historical value.”* **Alaska Inter-Tribal Council: Delice Calcote, Executive Director**

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