

Alaskans will be stuck with the consequences of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill — the largest in U.S. history — for many years to come. It's impossible to even guess at the total damages at this early date.

Although the report on the investigation of why this tragedy occurred probably will not be ready for some time, it appears that it is the result of sheer stupidity. The captain of the ship, Joseph J. Hazelwood, who reportedly has had his drivers' license suspended or revoked three times since 1984 for alcohol violations, was not at the helm when the tanker struck the reef.

We would suggest that Hazelwood be assigned to teams that will have to clean up the mess left by his spilled cargo. Perhaps this would spread a message to all ship captains — all ship crews — that they are not merely passengers through Prince William Sound, but people who have a very heavy obligation in protecting the sound's environment.

Finding out who was guilty in this particular episode is just part of the oil companies' problem, however. We would contend that if this accident was caused by stupidity, it's the kind of thing that is virtually impossible to prevent. So that means plans for doing something about it are critical.

It's amazing to us that Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. President George Nelson says his company was not slow in responding to the oil spill. In fact, he has been quoted as saying that he still feels that Alyeska has an outstanding record.

While it's true that this is the first major spill in Prince William Sound, we can't say this event leaves Alyeska with an outstanding record. And we agree with Gov. Steve Cowper, who had some very harsh words for the fact that little was done in this spill for days after the tanker struck the reef.

We're probably not alone in feeling betrayed by the oil companies. We were led to believe that extensive machinery and plans were in place, ready to be put to use in the event of just such a tragedy. If Alyeska honestly believes this is the best they can do, we say it's simply not good enough.

We urge Alyeska and the industry in general to simply admit their plans were inadequate. Defending themselves in the face of this monumental catastrophe is not going to do anyone any good.

We must learn as much as we can from it and go on, much, much sadder and much, much wiser.

