



RYUYU MARU NO. 2 AGROUND AT ST. PAUL HARBOR, AS SEEN FROM THE COMMUNITY OF ST. PAUL

Tundra Times Staff Photograph

## Spill effort turns to explosives

ST. PAUL ISLAND. The first in a series of explosions, designed to discharge oil and fish and poisonous gases from a shipwrecked Japanese fishing vessel, was detonated here Tuesday. The Ryuyu Maru No. 2, a 300-foot ship owned by Hokaido Fisheries, ran aground near St. Paul Nov. 8. The vessel has lost an estimated 180,000 gallons of diesel fuel from its tanks since the incident.

Except for a few small federal reserves, all the island is owned by the Tanadgusix Corporation, the St. Paul Native village corporation. The spill is the first known environmental disaster to

have occurred on lands selected and patented to a Native village.

St. Paul, with 450 residents, and St. George, with 150 persons, are the largest islands in the Pribilof Islands group. The Pribilofs are located 800 miles west by southwest of Anchorage, in the Bering Sea north of the Aleutian Chain.

They are breeding grounds for 1.4 million seals, or 80 percent of the world population of the Pacific Fur Seal. The cliffs of the islands are nesting areas for millions of sea birds. The Ryuyu Maru No. 2 ran aground near a nesting area for a rare species

of the kittiwake and for numerous other species of birds. Fuel from the ship has contaminated a lagoon north of the village, connected to the harbor by a narrow channel. Migratory waterfowl, primarily eider ducks, are now visiting the lagoon.

The lagoon is used by Natives for subsistence hunting. Found dead along shores of the lagoon were 45 birds, seven seals, and countless millions of amphipods, small crustaceans, and worms. These small animals are a primary food source for migratory waterfowl.

The effort to clean up the spill has been a slow process. Initially, the operation was to be conducted by owners of the ship. Crowley Environmental Services of Anchorage was hired to perform the job. The Coast Guard and government scientists were to act as performance monitors.

On Nov. 14, the Coast Guard assumed control of the project. Crowley has continued its effort to contain and remove the contamination.

Community representatives were briefed by Coast Guard and Crowley officials on Monday afternoon. They were told of changes in the original plan to remove the contaminants.

Originally, oil was to be pumped from the ship into bladders on landing craft and stored in a tank at St. Paul, or alternatively, pumped directly to shore. After salvaging any of the 1.4 million pounds of fish on board, the re-

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# ● Plans change for clean up

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mainder was to be buried in landfills on the island. Then, the ship was to be towed for repairs or sunk at sea, if salvage was not

possible.

On Monday, village leaders were told that there was no practical way to remove the ship, nor could oil be pumped out,

and the fish could not be removed for burial.

Severe structural damage to the vessel has caused the ship to buckle and crack at its midsec-

tion and has made removal impossible. High levels of extremely toxic ammonia, methane and hydrogen sulfide gases remain on board the ship, such that even self-contained breathing equipment does not offer adequate protection for ship-board operations.

Delays were experienced in bringing equipment to the island. Frequent storms occur in the Pribilofs at this time of year. Gale force winds struck the Pribilofs on Nov. 14, halting operations for two days. When pumping equipment arrived, hazardous shipboard and sea conditions prevented lightering the oil. It was discovered the pumps were not adequate to move the fuel directly from ship to shore.

A system for inhibiting the flow of oil into the lagoon was set in place on Nov. 18, ten days after the accident. The system consists of a dike, constructed of gravel and sand bags, extending part way across the channel between the harbor and lagoon, and booms to concentrate the fuel in an area where it can be collected.

The latest plan involves a series of explosive charges to be detonated on the ship. The explosives are to be strategically

placed to vent toxic gases and discharge oil, and with other charges later set off to discharge the 700 tons of fish into the sea.

The first explosions were set off on Tuesday. Officials decided it was best to discharge the oil while wind and wave conditions were most favorable for dispersing the contaminants. Additional charges will be detonated to discharge the fish.

The effort is expected to continue for at least another three weeks. Village hotel and restaurant facilities, normally closed for the winter, are operating at capacity to accommodate workers.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in Anchorage is conducting an investigation into the incident. Aleut leaders have questioned the wisdom of permitting the vessel to enter St. Paul harbor. They are anxious for the vessel to be removed at the earlier opportunity. The incident has also caused much concern about off-shore oil development proposed for the St. George Basin in the Bering Sea, based upon observation of the response to this spill. Most of all, village leaders say, they want the damage repaired and assurance that a similar accident will not happen again here in the Pribilofs.



THE SALT WATER LAGOON IN THE BACKGROUND IS LOCATED BETWEEN THE VILLAGE OF ST. PAUL AND SITE OF THE RYUYU MARU NO. 2 SHIPWRECK. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH, A DIKE IS BEING CONSTRUCTED ACROSS THE CHANNEL BETWEEN THE LAGOON AND HARBOR. —Staff Photograph