

Stevens tours oiled beaches

by **Katya Simpson**
for the **Tundra Times**

Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens toured oil spill cleanup areas in Alaska recently and left feeling very concerned about how much can be done to mop up the nation's worst oil spill.

Stevens traveled to Homer and Kodiak June 30, taking with him oil spill specialist Dave Kennedy of the National Oceanographic and At-

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mospheric Administration and several media representatives. Kennedy is based in Seattle, but has been working in Alaska full-time since the spill.

Stevens said what concerned him was the fact that despite the best efforts to get oil off beaches, much remains just below the surface.

Stevens also discussed the situation with Rear Adm. J. William Kime, commander of the 11th Coast Guard District.

The meeting was followed by a helicopter flight to see the oil spill damage done to nearby island beaches by the *Exxon Valdez* and to assess what needs to be done.

During a luncheon with local leaders in Kodiak Stevens was briefed on the community's response to the oil spill from both fishermen and environmentalists. He also met with local government officials in Homer and listened to the problems fishermen were having.

Stevens explained that he was working on legislation tightening regulations for oil tanker transportation and contingency plans.

As he left Kodiak, Stevens was fitted with an orange survival suit, and he then boarded a helicopter to get a first-hand account of the oiled land below. Twice the helicopter landed to allow the senator to walk on the lubricated beaches and get a feel for their condition.

One beach responded to Stevens with a black sticky squirt as he stepped off a log on to the oiled rocks.

Using a shovel borrowed from one of the workers on the beach, the senator dug below the top layer of rocks to find the sticky oil clinging to rocks below the surface.

Most of the oil is being cleaned off the beaches with hot water spray. This gets rid of some of the oil, but it is also washes much of it deeper, making it even harder to get rid of.

The oil spill specialist, Kennedy, discussed a new treatment being tested called the "bio-remediation method." This requires backhoes to turn over the top layer of rocks. Nutrients would then be added to enhance the growth of bacteria that degrade oil.

The bacteria thrive on oxygen, and so the backhoes would allow more oxygen to get to the subsurface. This type of tilling is usually done on land. Testing is being done to see whether it is appropriate technology for the shoreline.

The Environmental Protection Agency is doing tests at Snug Harbor near Kodiak, Prince William Sound, Knight Island and the Seward area. EPA officials say the method offers hope.

One of the difficulties is reaching all the oil now that much of it has seeped deeper into the beaches.

Stevens asked the oil spill specialist why oil couldn't just be burned off the rocks and logs scattered along the beaches.

Kennedy replied that besides letting off toxic fumes to the environment, the fire doesn't get hot enough to burn all the oil. That means much of the really thick gooey oil is left, making the substance even more difficult to remove.

Kennedy said the best way to get rid of the oil is through shoveling and manual labor. He said the problem is that when it rains, the water table is raised beneath the beaches, bringing the oil up to the surface and carrying it out to sea where it inevitably comes back to coat the rocks again.

He said right now removing the oil coated rocks is slow and laborious. It's the only solution, however, at this



photo by Kaiya Simpson

Dave Kennedy works for NOAA.

time, he added.

Three of the oil cleanup workers on a beach near the Barren Islands told the senator that they were shoveling oiled rocks into about 300 to 400 plastic garbage-size bags each day. They said the bags were later picked up each day by a boat.

Large rocks and seaweed by the side of the beach were more heavily coated and were being wiped with large diaper-like rags. The labor looked long and tiring.