

Nature cleans some, but not all beaches

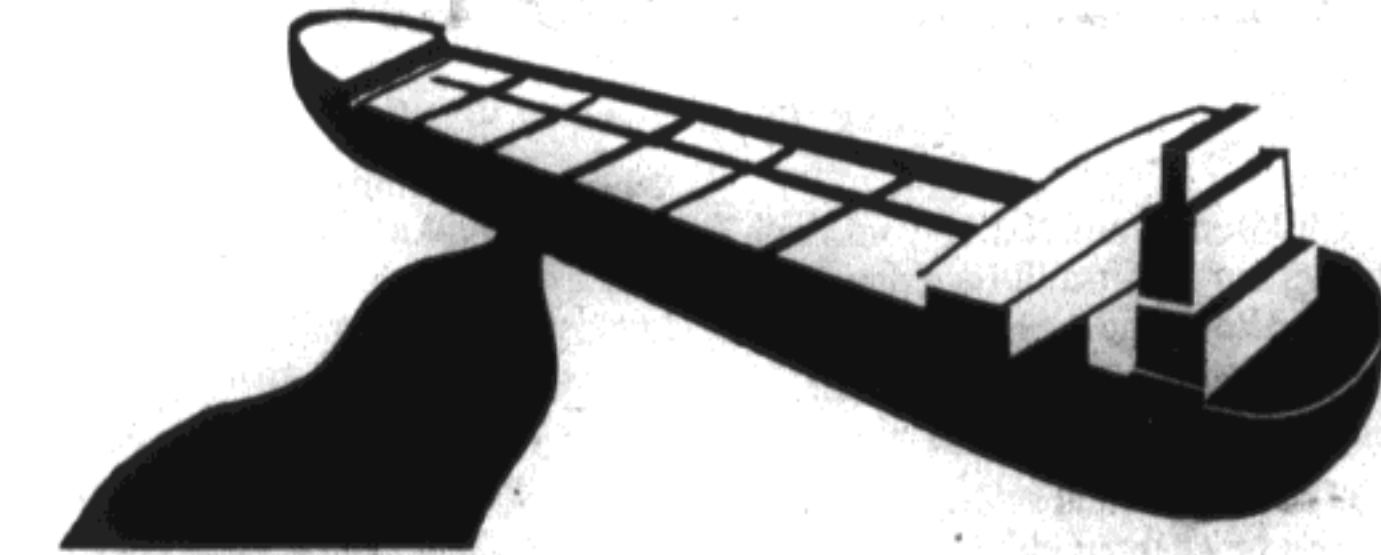
VALDEZ — Early observations by government and Exxon Co. USA teams suggest that nature is "cleaning" some beaches, but not others, according to the *Oil Spill Chronicle*, published by the state.

Beaches that experience a great deal of wave action are showing considerable improvement, at least on the surface, officials said.

According to Coast Guard Commander Will Griswold, extremely high tides in October, coupled with some storms from the northeast, scoured some of the oil from the surface of more exposed beaches. Griswold cited observations made at Point Helen on Knight Island as a good example of pronounced change from September to October.

Griswold's remarks were made in Anchorage at the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill operations meeting of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the Coast Guard and Exxon earlier this month.

DEC officials agree that Point Helen looks better than it did. However, Dale Gardner, DEC environmental field officer, said there continues to be a per-



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sistent problem with oil in beach sediments, even at Point Helen.

"On October 26, most of the surface showed little oiling or just stain, which is very different from what it

was like in September," Gardner said in Valdez.

"But when you dug to a depth of about a foot or more, you started finding oil with regularity."

Steve Provant, the state's on scene coordinator, said it's too early to be too optimistic about what will be cleaned naturally.

"It's not time to write off human effort," he said. "We're sticking with a careful plan of observation and testing, with an eye to resuming some kind of work in the spring."

Provant also noted that once oil has left a beach, it's in the water. While winter weather is likely to break up and disperse some oil, large sheens continue to plague many areas as oil bleeds from beaches.

Numerous oil sheens on the water streaming away from contaminated beaches were reported by both DEC and Exxon at the meeting. Provant said conspicuous sheens were observed during October overflights in Prince William Sound.

"To date we've seen 66 sheens in four weeks of overflights," in the sound, Exxon spokesman Dan Taft said.

The next operations meeting is scheduled for Dec. 12 at the Federal Building in Anchorage.