

Excel Navigation fined for Aleutian Oil Spill

by David Totten
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The Panamanian company charged with spilling oil off St. Paul Island in February was fined \$92,600 on August 12.

U.S. District Judge James K. Singleton agreed to go along with a plea bargain worked out last month that dropped the charges against the captain of the boat, Gi Ha Gang.

Excel Navigation, owner of the cargo ship *Citrus*, pleaded guilty to a violation of the Migratory Birds Treaty Act for the spill that killed over a thou-

sand bird, mostly king eiders.

"We don't know how much oil was expended," said Lt. Com. Bryan Schroder of the Coast Guard, "but certainly the damage to the birds was significant, and that's why we charged this under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act."

The bulk of the fine was the \$85,000 paid to the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. \$7,500 was paid to the Coast Guard and \$100 went for the court costs.

Even though the captain of the ship was charged, Karen Loeffler of the U.S. Attorney's Office felt it was fair to drop those charges.

"The spill itself did not appear to be

an intentional act," Loeffler said, "Different than, let's say, pumping oil overboard on purpose. There was an incident that started this which involved a hole in the side of the vessel. We don't know exactly how the oil went overboard, but it seemed an appropriate settlement."

There are still issues to be resolved in this case. The Coast Guard National Pollution Fund Center will now try to determine exactly how much the cleanup of the spill cost them. The Coast Guard will try to recover those costs from Excel Navigation. Schroder would not comment on how much that bill might amount to.