

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill:
The Tragedy that Struck Alaska

Maggie Eid
Senior Division
Individual Website

Prior to beginning my research, I knew that I wanted to do a topic involving the environment, as I am passionate about nature. When I started the brainstorming process, I was focused on tragedy, and the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill was on my list of the biggest environmental disasters in recent U.S. history. As I learned more, I became increasingly interested in the chaos and disorganization that caused one of the largest oil spills in American history. I wanted to tell the stories of the hundreds of thousands of animals and people affected by this oil spill.

One benefit of a recent disaster is the number of memorials, museum exhibits, and advocacy groups who make information available. The State of Alaska has a vast collection, and litigation records provided many sources. Due to the remoteness of the location where the spill occurred, I was fortunate to have online access to much of this material. There were a number of books that I found particularly helpful, including Art Davidson's *In the Wake of Exxon Valdez*, Stan Stephens's journal, and Stan Jones and Sharon Bushell's book, *The Spill: Personal Stories from the Exxon Valdez Disaster*. Furthermore, articles and newscasts from the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the oil spill were interesting for their retrospective commentary. In some ways, the scope of the disaster can only be appreciated after this passage of time, but it was recent enough that the context was accessible. I took the opportunity to elicit recollections of family members and friends who experienced the spill through media coverage at the time.

I chose a website for my format, for it provided an ideal platform for presenting all of the pictures and videos of the spill. This visual coverage was vital to raising public sentiment in favor of stronger regulation. Looking at the countless images of animals covered in oil was disheartening; I often found that I needed to take a break from research. I struggled with

capturing the true catastrophe that was the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the limited word count; there were countless stories that I wanted to relay.

The Exxon Valdez oil spill relates to this year's theme of Triumph and Tragedy, for the tragic outcomes of the spill led to the creation of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Initially, I found it difficult to find a triumph that was proportionate to the level of destruction, but in the end, I believe that the legislation created, which resulted from the public's response to the spill, was truly a triumph in its ability to prevent future damage. The Exxon Valdez spill demonstrates that improvements and progress can result from great tragedy.