

US seeks to prevent spill from grounded oil rig

January 2 2013



This image provided by the US Coast Guard, shows the conical mobile drilling unit Kulluk owned by Royal Dutch Shell aground on the southeast side of Sitkalidak Island, Alaska, January 1, 2013. US Coast Guard vowed Wednesday to prevent fuel from leaking from a Shell oil rig that grounded in Alaska after breaking free from tugboats towing it in heavy seas.

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The Kalluk mobile drilling unit was being towed to Seattle when it broke free on New Year's Eve and washed ashore near Kodiak Island, some 300 miles (480 km) southwest of Anchorage.

The rig has some 150,000 gallons of ultra-low sulphur diesel and roughly 12,000 gallons of oil and hydraulic fluid, according to the far northwestern US state's KTUU television station.

There is no sign of leaks, but further checks were being made as authorities considered how to salvage the structure, the Coast Guard said after US senator Lisa Murkowski visited a Command Center set up for the incident Tuesday.

"Senator Murkowski shares the Coast Guard's desire to protect the pristine Alaska environment and response personnel," said Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo in an update posted online Wednesday.

"Everyone involved in the response effort has the same objective: to safely recover the Kulluk without injuries or impact to the environment. So far, response personnel have demonstrated great resourcefulness and adaptability to the weather and other challenges in a very difficult operation."

Eighteen crew members had already been evacuated from the rig before it broke free late Monday, New Year's Eve, KTUU reported. By Tuesday it was described as "upright and rocking with a slow, but stable motion."

Oil company Royal Dutch Shell said three people suffered minor injuries during the response to the Kulluk's grounding, according to the television station.

"The [extreme weather conditions](#) and high seas continue to be a challenge, said Shell incident commander Susan Childs. "Our priority right now is maintaining the safety of our response personnel and evaluating next steps."

Kodiak Island is a few hundred miles from Prince William Sound, where the "Exxon Valdez" oil tanker spilled around 11 million gallons (40 million litres) in March 1989, in one of the world's worst ever ecological disasters.

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