Sleep Deprivation Fatality File

Oil Tanker Spills: Exxon Valdez Oil Tankers

On March 24, one of Exxon Valdez's oil tankers hit the Prince William Sound's Bligh Reef in Alaska. Over a few days, about 10.8 million gallons of oil spilled into the water affecting over 1,000 miles of shoreline.

A report from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council outlines five possible causes of this industrial accident. Among the five possible causes outlined, two identify sleep deprivation and fatigue as a possible contributing factor.

The first possible cause is a failure to properly maneuver the vessel due to excessive workload or fatigue. Other reports claim that the third mate in charge of driving the vessel was napping because it was the only time he could rest after a 16-hour shift.

Another reason was the company's failure to provide a well-rested crew to support the leaders of the vessel. During the crash, the crew just got off a 22-hour shift of loading oil into the cargo tank.

Many experts believe that this was one of the worst man-made environmental disasters in history. Not only did it lead to the death of over 250,000 animals, but it also damaged the livelihood of the locals who were dependent on tourism and fishing.