

north shore news

LETTER: History disproves spill predictions

North Shore News

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Dear Editor:

Living Oceans Society's Karen Wristen states that the 1990 federal government-commissioned oil spill study predicted a catastrophic (defined as more than 10,000 tonnes) spill in Canadian waters every 15 years, with the probability of a major spill (100-10,000 tonnes) annually. She then asks someone to explain how the Kinder Morgan study can show far lower spill probabilities. That federal report, the Brander-Smith Report, relies on spill statistics from a 1971 Canadian Coast Guard memo - that 43 year old memo was written based on the worst pre-1971 years in history for worldwide tanker spills. The Brander-Smith Report cautioned that their predictions assumed nothing would change in tanker operations. As a result of Exxon Valdez and other accidents, operations, design, and regulation of tankers changed in Canada and across the world, resulting in world tanker spill frequency (over 700 tonnes) dropping 93 per cent from the 1970s to the years 2010-12. We now have mandatory use of doublehulled oil tankers, GPS navigation, tethered tugs, coastal pilots, and other safety measures in B.C. waters to bring tankers into Vancouver Harbour, all new since the 1970s.

I am surprised that Ms. Wristen did not check actual Canadian spill results - why not compare predictions to historical reality, not just to other forecasts? Canada has never had a spill over 10,000 tonnes. Both spill predictions mentioned by Ms. Wristen have been totally disproved by actual history. Oil tankers have sailed B.C. waters to and from Vancouver Harbour for a century, with no significant spill other than one of canola oil. I would suggest that in future, Ms. Wristen check the historical accuracy of her quoted spill predictions before she questions Kinder Morgan's forecast - or anybody's!

John Hunter

North Vancouver

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