No Fuel Spill Reported at Site of Kulluk Grounding

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

As of early this morning the grounded Shell Exploration drilling rig Kulluk is reported as remaining stable with no oil spill pollution observed. That word from the Unified Command office at 6:50 this morning. It echoes the latest situation reports from the Command, made up of industry, state, federal and local agencies. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation’s situation report concurs.

The floating, mobile drill rig Kulluk is called a “conical drilling unit,” or CDU. It was being towed from Unalaska back to Seattle when its tug experienced engine problems southwest of Kodiak on Friday. The Coast Guard Cutter Alex Haley and two other private ships responded to assist, but after a series of tow lines snapped, the Kulluk went aground Monday night on Sitkalidak Island, just off the southeast quarter of Kodiak Island. The exact location is between the north end of Ocean Bay and Partition Cove. (Lat 57p 5' 28.099N, Long 153p 6' 23.546W)

Commander Shane Montoya, the federal on-scene coordinator, said during a briefing Tuesday the tow ships tried to direct the Kulluk to a position that might minimize the impact to the environment and damage to the rig.

The Kulluk carries 136,240-gallons of diesel fuel and over 10,000 gallons of various lubes and oils. Shell’s Susan Childs says the Kulluk’s fuel tanks are encased in very heavy steel and located at the center of the rig.

The DEC’s Allen Wein says crews are ready to respond if any fuel is spilled.

Oil spill response equipment was staged on the Kodiak waterfront yesterday. Crews are waiting for favorable weather conditions to fly salvage personnel out to the Kulluk. There is a gale warning in the marine weather forecast through tonight, with seas to 15 feet.

Childs says it may take weeks or months to determine the sequence of mishaps that led to the grounding.

The area of the grounding is in critical habitat for endangered sea lions and the Kittlitz's Murrelet, and near a number of salmon streams.