

Assessment Teams Find Little Structural Damage in Kulluk

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Two more assessment teams were put on the Royal Dutch Shell drilling rig Kulluk Thursday to continue determining the extent of damage caused by its grounding on New Years Eve near Kodiak Island. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard says it should be able to balance its role in the recovery efforts with its responsibility to assure safety in winter fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea.

Weather conditions around Sitkalidak Island improved enough that a Coast Guard helicopter was able to lower a five-person assessment team onto the deck of the grounded rig Kulluk yesterday, and another 11 today. The crew yesterday spent about three hours aboard the rig.

Shell's Alaska Venture Operations Manager Sean Churchfield said the preliminary report from the crew showed a mostly intact interior, though some significant water damage.

-- (Churchfield Wave Damage 30 sec "Findings include some wave damage … options are being developed.")

The lack of on-board power could complicate the recovery operation and may require electrical generators be temporarily installed to assist the salvors. Smit Salvage is the company that will attempt to free the Kulluk. Smit worked on the salvage of the Selendang Ayu (sell's en-dang eye-u) after it broke up on Unalaska Island in 2004, and assisted in the Costa Concordia cruise ship salvage off the coast of Italy last year.

Captain Paul Malher, the federal on-scene coordinator, reiterated that it was too early to speculate on a time frame for getting the Kulluk off the beach OR even how that might be accomplished. He did say the official investigation has begun.

-- (Mehler Investigate 22 sec "Following a request made, investigators are en route … made available to the public upon completion.")

Winter fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea are getting underway, and Mehler says the Coast Guard can still provide law enforcement and search and rescue operations while responding to the Kulluk grounding:

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(Mehler Fishing Patrol 33 sec "We are putting all the

assets, all the personnel we can … and what we can manage.”)

Steven Russell of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation was on an overflight of the rig found no indication of spilled fuel or affected wildlife:

-- (Russell No Spill 35 sec “We did not observe on our flight anyway, any wildlife … did not see any other debris that we could identify back to the rig.”)

Russell said the lifeboats from the Kulluk gave him a good idea of currents in the area, and where any potential pollution might travel.

As a precaution however, Churchfield said oil spill response equipment is being moved out of storage in Seward and staged in Kodiak. The Unified Command is seeking permission from the village of Old Harbor, just 10 miles away, to stage equipment there as well.