

Alaskan fishermen say Exxon's millions did more harm than good to oil-spill area

VALDEZ, Alaska (AP) — Exxon's infusion of thousands of oil-spill cleanup workers and millions of dollars into Prince William Sound did as much harm as good, fishermen charged Thursday as the six-month cleanup ground to a halt.

"It's time that everyone realizes that no amount of money in the world is going to restore Prince William Sound to a pristine condition," said Riki Ott of Cordova District Fishermen United.

While about a third of the sound's fishing fleet worked for Exxon this summer, and in some cases profited handsomely, fishermen who opted to fish suffered from a restricted salmon season and a poor catch.

With most of the sound closed for fishing, fishermen were forced to compete in a small area for a few fish. "This year we were like rats penned inside a cage," said Dave Clarke of the Prince William Sound Seiners Association.

In addition, businesses that depend on fishermen suffered because much of Exxon's cash was not spent on fishing supplies and gear, Clarke said.

"The money spill has probably been as devastating as the oil spill," Clarke said.

The fishermen's observations came at a news conference as Exxon continued to return the last of the cleanup workers from oil-tainted

shores in the sound. Exxon officials said they expect to declare the summer cleanup over Friday, 25

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weeks after the tanker Exxon Valdez cracked open on a reef and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of crude oil.

While the fishermen did not criticize their colleagues for accepting Exxon's cash, they said the money has caused an emotional division between those who accepted and those who did not. Fishermen scraping by this season fear they may be at a competitive disadvantage next year because they can't afford better boats and gear.

Ott said the cleanup effort stemmed more from public relations needs than environmental concerns. Once the Friday cleanup deadline was set, Exxon began using warmer water and higher pressure to hose down the oiled shorelines faster, doing more harm than good, she said.

"The beach cleanup should not be evaluated on the amount spent, the amount of equipment and people working on it. It should be evaluated on its effectiveness," Ott said.

Ott said her group favors a "permanent scaleback" of the cleanup, with smaller "strike forces" set up to respond to sensitive areas threatened by oil washing off the shorelines.

Social Security Earnings Test, said the study bolsters the case for legislation to repeal the limits and deflects arguments the change would be too costly.

"That's the importance of this study, that we can start to tell the White House, 'Listen, there isn't a revenue cost here,'" said Hastert, whose bill to eliminate the earnings test for those aged 65 and above has more than 130 co-sponsors. "Eliminating the earnings limit is basically a win-win situation."

Under current law, workers aged 65 to 69 lose \$1 in Social Security benefits for every \$2 they earn above \$8,880. The limit is \$6,480 for workers under age 65; there is no limit for those 70 or older.

Starting in 1990, benefits for those age 65-69 will be reduced by \$1 for every \$3 earned above the limit, which rises with growth in average wages.

Almost 1 million Social Security beneficiaries lose benefits each year, and an additional 100,000 people in the 65-69 age group do not file for Social Security benefits because of the limit, according to the Social Security Administration.

Group urges relaxation of Social Security benefits

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government would come out ahead if it repealed or relaxed a law that reduces the Social Security benefits of senior citizens who earn more than a limited amount of outside income, a group of House Republicans said Thursday.

GOP critics of Social Security's earnings test released a private study concluding that at least 700,000 retirees would rejoin the labor market if the law were scrapped. The new workers would generate more in income and payroll taxes than the government would pay out in increased Social Security benefits.

"The retirement earnings limit is a cruel penalty imposed on elderly workers," said Aldona Robbins, a former Treasury Department economist who co-authored the study. "It punishes the elderly but doesn't save the government any money."

The study was sponsored by two conservative-oriented research groups in Dallas, the Institute for Policy Innovation and the National Center for Policy Analysis, and released by a task force of the House Republican Research Committee.

Rep. Dennis Hastert, chairman of the committee's Task Force on the

Romanian family rides to freedom in prune truck

RIDDERKERK, Netherlands (AP) — Sixteen members of a Romanian family hid for two days in a truck carrying prunes to escape from their East bloc nation to the West, police said Thursday.

The emigres, who included seven children, were in good condition when they arrived at the police station in this western Dutch town six miles south of Rotterdam on Wednesday night, according to spokesman Johan Emond.

Emond said the family, with children ranging in age from one to 11 years, paid the truck's driver \$325 for the trip, which began Tuesday in the western Romanian city of Timisoara.

It was the biggest group of Eastern Europeans seeking asylum here in recent years. In the first seven months of 1989, a total of 6,350 people have asked for political asylum in the Netherlands, according to the Justice Ministry.

Migrant workers say employer forced them to drop wage lawsuit

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Two migrant workers were threatened by their Wisconsin employer to withdraw from a lawsuit earlier this month against the state's new minimum wage, documents showed Thursday.

Francisco and Silvia Carrizales said in sworn affidavits taken in Hidalgo County, Texas, that their employers, John and JoAnne Knoch, and an unidentified supervisor "intimidated us to a point that we had to sign a document saying that we didn't want anything to do with the lawsuit. This happened on numerous occasions while at work."

Knoch, a member of the state Council on Migrant Labor and a Westfield cucumber farm owner, denied coercion was used to get the statements.

"That's crazy," Knoch said in a telephone interview. "We stand 100 percent behind everything we submitted to the court. I can assure you there was no coercion

or arm twisting." Knoch said he believed he was singled out for the lawsuit because he was a member of the migrant labor council, and he said he never made the threats contained in the latest affidavits.

"We are still fearful that he will come to Texas and pressure us here in our homes because when we were up there he, and his wife and crewleader harassed us constantly to a point that we were very unsure of our safety and well being," the affidavits said.

The Carrizaleses, who claim Knoch forced them to sign the statements Sept. 5 before leaving Wisconsin, said they do not want to be dropped from the lawsuit against the state and Knoch.

Michele Sumara, a Legal Action attorney in Milwaukee, said attempts were being made to locate a family of five other migrant workers who signed a similar statement dated Aug. 29 asking to be dropped from the lawsuit.

British Petroleum sells assets, cuts work force to focus on exploration

LONDON (AP) — British Petroleum Co. PLC said Thursday it was selling \$1.31 billion in assets and cutting its work force by 17 percent in a major restructuring aimed at boosting efficiency and focusing on "higher-risk, higher-reward" oil exploration.

BP, the world's fourth-largest oil company, said it would sell exploration assets in the North Sea and six other countries to Oryx Energy Co., one of the largest independent oil and gas producers in the United States.

BP said it has agreed to sell 9 percent of its British exploration assets in the North Sea, including four oil-and-gas-producing fields, five prospective developments and 42 unexplored blocks.

It said it would slash 1,700 jobs in Scotland, London and Houston. The cuts are to be achieved through early retirement and voluntary departures but the company didn't rule out layoffs.

The London-based oil giant said the streamlining should reduce overhead by more than \$150 million a year.

BP Exploration is being reorganized into three re-

gional operating companies, and international technology division and a global gas unit, BP said.

BP's shares fell on the news. They finished at 320 pence, or \$4.99, a share on London's Stock Exchange, down 5 pence, or 8 cents, from Wednesday's close.

"We have to get into a position where our assets are working most efficiently," John Browne, chief executive officer of BP Exploration, told a news conference.

BP's margins were being pressured by higher costs, higher taxes, greater regulation, and environmental and safety concerns, Browne said.

"We haven't taken the meat-axe to the company," he said. "We're preparing not only for today but also for tomorrow. We're shifting our focus to ensure that we put enough money into frontier exploration."

Browne said the proceeds from the asset sale would allow the company to invest in areas it believes have more potential — Vietnam, Ethiopia, the Gulf of Mexico and the western margins of the British continental shelf.

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