

[Cantwell Introduces Bill to Jumpstart Oil Spill Response Capability](#)

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : August 7, 2013 at 5:24 am

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) recently introduced legislation to kick start investment in *The Oil Spill Technology and Development Act of 2013*

([S. 1483](#)), introduced on August 2, would encourage innovative approaches for responding to oil spills in the 21st century.

The legislation would establish small, targeted grants to further the development of new technologies to effectively contain and clean up oil spills.

Cantwell's bill would also require research into methods of cleaning up oil spills in icy conditions and addressing [sink](#), which make it harder to contain and remove oil from the water's surface.

Canadian companies are poised to increase traffic of supertankers carrying tar sands oil through the waters around the San Juan Islands and in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Barges with tar sands oil are already crossing the Puget Sound and according to some reports, tanker traffic could increase by 300 percent in the future.

"Oil spills pose a threat to Washington's coastal economy and to the health of our waterways," said a spokesman for the Washington State Department of Ecology, a major spill would have a significant impact on Washington state's coastal economy, which employs 165,000 people and generates \$10.8 billion in annual economic activity. A spill would also severely hurt the state's export dependent economy because international shipping would likely be severely restricted.

Washington state's waters support a huge variety of fish, shellfish, seabirds, marine mammals, and plants, including a number of Endangered Species Act-protected species such as Southern Resident orcas and Chinook salmon. With updated oil spill response plans with new technology, cleaning up oil from incidents like the [sinking](#) of the vessel in Penn Cove in 2012 could occur more quickly and effectively. As of November 2012, some 254 vessels were [listed](#) on the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' Derelict Vessel Removal Program.

Major provisions in the *Oil Spill Technology and Development Act of 2013* include:

- Establishing a new oil spill research committee:** The bill would streamline the Federal Oil Spill Research Committee made up of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Coast Guard, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of the Interior. This move was [recommended](#) in a Government Accountability Office report from 2011.
- Building an oil spill research program:** This research and development initiative would be overseen by the new committee and would spearhead the issuing of competitive grants to universities and other research institutions. These grants would award projects developing innovative methods for responding to oil spills.
- Beginning comprehensive reviews of oil spill technology:** The legislation would authorize the Coast Guard to thoroughly review and evaluate new oil spill response technology. The bill would also give the Coast Guard authority to review and update regional oil spill response plans every five

years to ensure the best available technology is in place. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 demonstrated the chronic underinvestment in oil spill research and development. Currently, the industry lacks incentives and requirements to research, develop and adopt new cleanup technologies — even those that are proven effective. Among the new oil spill response technologies are oil solidifiers, blowout preventers, new techniques to break down spilled oil, fiber membranes to strain oil from water, and software to ensure equipment works properly during clean up. Cantwell has played a leading role in pushing for a more comprehensive response to major oil spills. The U.S. Coast Guard Authorization Bill ([HR 2838](#)) [signed](#) into law by President Obama on December 20, 2012, included Cantwell’s amendments requiring the Coast Guard to complete an analysis and recommend methods for managing and minimizing the potential increases in supertanker, tanker and barge traffic exporting Canadian tar sands oil. In October 2010, President Obama [signed](#) legislation Cantwell authored that required the Coast Guard to pursue enforcement of international oil pollution agreements covering the high seas. It also required the Coast Guard to address the risk of spills resulting from oil transfer operations and from human error, and establish a grant program to reduce smaller spills on recreational boats or fishing vessels. The bill also required the Coast Guard to complete a study to address cross-border spill response capabilities along Washington state’s shared maritime boundaries with Canada. In July 2010, Cantwell chaired a [hearing](#) of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard about the lack of appropriate technology to respond to a major oil spill like Deepwater Horizon. At that hearing, Cantwell noted that spill response technologies have changed little between the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.