

Jim McHale brings his world view to CIRCAC's Prevention, Response, Operations & Safety (PROPS) Committee

Jim McHale has provided professional, technical and emergency management services to U.S. and foreign governmental agencies, local communities, cruise ship, commercial fishing and oil industries for years. With clients in Turkey and the former Soviet Union and 30 years of experience, he applies his world view to local decision making as Vice Chair of Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council's Prevention, Response, Operations and Safety (PROPS) Committee.



Photo courtesy of Jim McHale

The PROPS Committee reviews and assesses oil spill prevention and response measures, including planning, preparedness, containment and mitigation and advises the Board of Directors. Committee members and staff work together to advance projects and facilitate communications among citizens, regulatory groups, special interest groups, and industry, often applying their experience with the regulatory process, oil facility operations, or maritime issues.

CIRCAC's Director of Operations, Steve "Vinnie" Catalano, credited Jim's broad experience for bringing the next level of understanding about industry response to Committee deliberations. "Jim uses that knowledge to help guide committee conversations. His experience and demeanor position him as a PROPS ally. So when Jim addresses an issue to the committee, they take it as fact—and rightfully so. This guy is the genuine article," he said.

Jim's interaction with CIRCAC began in the early years of the organization's development when he was manager of the Valdez Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, or SERVS.

Working closely with Prince William Sound RCAC's prevention committee which had oversight of SERVS allowed him to understand some of the Council's concerns regarding industry operations.

Jim also worked as General Manager for Alaska Clean Seas and as a regional Vice President for SEACOR Environmental Services International. He applied to serve on CIRCAC's PROPS Committee in 2014 after a 3-year overseas tour in Azerbaijan. "I felt I could bring some of my field experiences to bear and volunteered to assist and help," he said.

Now semi-retired, Jim works as a consultant on drill exercises and active oil spill responses, including the Deepwater Horizon incident. During that event, Jim was operations section chief responsible for 3,400 people, 814 boats, 100 tugs and barges, and three nearshore floating hotels. Asked how such a large scale event was handled, he explained that the approach was to break it into manageable pieces. Hence there



PROPS Committee tours the Alaska Bird Rescue Center. From left: John Bauer, Walt Sonen, Ted Moore, Robert Reges, Bob Flint, Bob Pawlowski, Vaito'a Heaven (Staff), Barbara Callahan (Alaska Bird Rescue Center) Steve Lufkin, Rob Lindsey, Jim McHale and Carla Stanley. (Photo by Steve "Vinnie" Catalano)

were 19 different branches, equal in responsibilities, all reporting up a military-like chain of command to State headquarters (of five different states), through to the National Command System.

As Vice Chair of CIRCAC's PROPS Committee, Jim says he doesn't see a lot of problems just standing in the road. Instead, he sees a committee that works to alleviate potential problems before they happen. He refers to CIRCAC's efforts to complete a Cook Inlet Pipeline Infrastructure Risk Assessment as an example of forward thinking. And while there are problems and challenges, he says they are not insurmountable. "I see things being handled efficiently and effectively," he said.

This month, Jim, along with Director Bob Flint and CIRCAC staff (Steve "Vinnie" Catalano and Jerry



Rombach) will represent the PROPS Committee at Clean Gulf, an annual event that focuses on planning and preparedness for oil and hazardous materials spills. According to Jim, the field of oil spill prevention and response is seeing a lot of ideas, and research and development efforts, but not a lot of new technology, and no silver bullet. He described it as seeing continuous improvements, but no radical leaps.

Jim is a retired U.S. Air Force Vietnam veteran who was stationed at Elmendorf Air Force Base in 1974. He put himself through 14 years of night school (three nights a week) pursuing a college degree while working and supporting his family. Jim and his wife, Marian, now enjoy life in Soldotna's Funny River area. He has one daughter—who has been in the U.S. Air Force for 21 years—and two grandchildren who live in Minot, North Dakota. With undergraduate studies in Business Administration, Jim has participated in national and international studies on contingency planning, prevention, and response strategies and

is published nationally and internationally in conference proceedings, magazines and journals. In addition to serving as Vice Chair of the PROPS Committee, Jim also serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors for Central Peninsula Hospital, Commander of the Kenai Peninsula Chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and as a member of the Kenai Peninsula College Advisory Council.

From left: Carla Stanley, Steve "Vinnie" Catalano (staff) and Jim McHale take a break during this year's Clean Gulf Conference. (Photo courtesy of Carla Stanley)