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Ecology, U.S Coast Guard monitoring tug that lost propulsion in Strait of Juan de Fuca

OLYMPIA - The state Department of Ecology (Ecology) and U.S. Coast Guard are monitoring the 170-foot tug Commitment that lost propulsion and went adrift shortly after 1 p.m. today in the Strait of Juan de Fuca about 19 miles northwest of Port Angeles, posing the risk of an oil spill.

The Commitment, owned by Crowley Maritime Corp. is part of a connected tug and barge combination. The tug was pushing a fuel barge containing about eight million gallons of diesel and jet fuel toward Portland when it lost propulsion. The tug itself is carrying more than 100,000 gallons of fuel.

Crowley Maritime called for the tug Jeffrey Foss, the industry-funded emergency response towing vessel stationed at Neah Bay, to assist the barge and prevent an oil spill. The Jeffrey Foss has reached the Commitment.

This is the first time the industry-funded response vessel has been called out to assist a vessel that has lost propulsion in the Strait. The private maritime industry took over funding the tug on July 1, 2010.

State Sen. Kevin Ranker, who sponsored legislation to permanently fund the Neah Bay tug, said the incident "points out the critical importance of the Neah Bay tug and the state spill prevention and response program to protect our waters."

He said, "It also raises the question whether a tug positioned at the entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca is sufficient to protect the area around the San Juan Islands, almost 100 miles away."

More information about the incident will be provided as soon as it becomes available.

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