

## 1989 Exxon Valdez spill back in court

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Exxon Mobil has gone to the U.S. Supreme Court to argue the \$2.5 billion penalty for the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill off Alaska is excessive based on maritime law. This week, the oil company filed a brief claiming an 1818 decision has well-established prohibition on punitive damages against ship owners for the actions of their crews unless they "directed," "countenanced" or "participated" in them, the Anchorage (Alaska) Daily News reported. In 1994, an Anchorage jury awarded \$5 billion in damages to commercial fishermen, cannery workers, landowners and Natives, but last year the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco cut the award to \$2.5 billion, which Exxon is now appealing. Exxon spokesman Tony Cudmore told the newspaper the punitive damages were excessive. "The company has spent over \$3.5 billion on compensation, cleanup payments, settlements and fines," he said. "It's a case about whether further punishment is warranted and we do not believe that punitive damages are warranted in this case." The Exxon Valdez hit a reef in Prince William Sound on March 29, 1989, and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of crude oil.

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