

Exxon Valdez case timeline

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WEDNESDAY: Final oral arguments before the Supreme Court, which should rule by June, ending the case.

2007: The Appeals Court declines to reconsider the damages amount. Exxon appeals and the Supreme Court agrees to hear the case.

2006: A three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals cuts to \$2.5 billion the amount Exxon should pay in damages.

2004: Holland orders Exxon to pay \$4.5 billion in punitive damages.

2003: The appeals court panel vacates the award and tells Holland to reconsider it in light of a new U.S. Supreme Court ruling involving punitive damages. In that other case, the justices provided a guideline that punitive damages should be less than 10 times the actual damages.

2002: U.S. District Judge Russel Holland reduces the punitive damages award to \$4 billion, saying he could not "by any principled means" reduce it further. Exxon says it will appeal again.

2001: Federal appeals court rules against Exxon on most points but agrees that the \$5 billion verdict is excessive. Returns the case to a lower court to determine a new amount.

1994: A jury awards the plaintiffs \$287 million in actual damages and \$5 billion in punitive damages. Exxon vows to appeal to the Supreme Court if necessary.

1989: Fishermen, land and business owners, and others harmed by the spill begin filing civil lawsuits against Exxon. The cases are eventually combined for the trial.

MARCH 24, 1989: Exxon Valdez tanker, skippered by Capt. Joe Hazelwood, runs aground on Bligh Reef, spilling more than 11 million gallons of crude oil in Prince William Sound.

Note: Between 1990 and 1994, Hazelwood was convicted of negligent discharge of oil but acquitted of drunken driving; Exxon pleaded guilty to four environmental crimes and paid \$125 million in criminal fines plus \$900 million to settle civil lawsuits filed by the government; and Exxon settled a civil suit filed by about 3,500 Alaska Natives for \$20 million for damage to subsistence hunting and gathering.

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