

Date: October 26, 1997

Monterey Bay Bird Incident

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Phone: 408-469-1719 (after 1pm) Time: 3:30 p.m.

MONTEREY — The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) have taken the lead to rescue wildlife affected by a sticky substance in the waters of Monterey Bay. Birds in distress are being reported from as far south as Pacific Grove, and as far north as Año Nuevo State Park.

An overflight by the U.S. Coast Guard and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revealed that the "slick" was still in a narrow band about 1.5 miles offshore, between the mouth of the Salinas River and Point Santa Cruz. This is the same area it occupied yesterday.

County of Santa Cruz Health Officer, Dr. George Wolfe, MD, has stated that the material poses no threat to public health. All beaches are open, and their use is not restricted in any way. However, the public is advised to avoid touching the substance, since we don't yet know exactly what it is. Samples are being sent to the DFG chemistry lab laboratories, today, for specific identification.

"Until we know what the substance is, we don't know how to deal with it, or what we can use to clean the birds," said DFG Warden Dave Fox, Incident Commander. A temporary incident command post has been established at DPR's Sunset Beach ranger station. This afternoon, the command post will move to DFG's Oiled Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center, where approximately 200 oiled birds have been taken for immediate care. Fifty more birds have been sent to the International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) in Berkeley for longer-term rehabilitation.

"While this material mats the birds' feathers, disabling them, and impairing their insulation from cold," said DFG Senior Veterinarian Dave Jessup. "It's important to get them into a warm hospital environment, to prevent hypothermia, which can kill them."

DFG has activated its Oiled Wildlife Care Network, of which IBRRC and Friends of the Sea Otter are members. Santa Cruz Native Wildlife Rescue is providing volunteers. Anyone discovering wildlife affected by the mystery substance should call DFG Wildlife Operations at (408) 469-1719. If that line is busy, call Santa Cruz Native Wildlife Rescue at (408) 462-0726. People wishing to assist in the rescue operations should work through the existing volunteer structure, by calling the Volunteer Coordinator at 469-1719.

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