

CONTACT: Dana Michaels, PAO
PHONE: 916-327-3200

DATE: January 30, 1996
TIME: 1:00 P.M.

Tarballs Washing Onto North Coast

The State Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) is investigating fresh oil "tar-patties" — ranging in size from one to twelve inches — that have washed onto California's north coast, from Point Reyes to Cape Mendocino, north of Fort Bragg. The Chief Ranger at Point Reyes National Seashore reported tar patties on the beach near Abbotts Lagoon to the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, at 4:45 P.M. on Sunday, January 29.

First sighted by a volunteer for the Gulf of the Farallons National Marine Sanctuary, the oil has been reported at Point Reyes National Seashore, the beach at *Estero Americano* (Bodega Bay), Manchester State Beach, Steamboat Rock (south of Cape Mendocino), and *Ten-Mile Beach* at MacKerricher State Park, north of Fort Bragg. OSPR Lieutenant John Clithero flew over the coastline at Point Reyes, yesterday, and estimated an oil slick just offshore was roughly 50-100 yards long by several feet wide.

OSPR wardens and biologists are collecting samples of the oil, which will be tested at the OSPR Petroleum Chemistry Lab. If the oil's chemistry is not that of a natural California formation, officials will know that the pollution was not caused by a natural seep. That would indicate that the spill originated from a vessel. The oil will be further analyzed to determine whether it all came from a common source.

OSPR Scientific Assistant Branch Chief Mel Odemar says that five dead, oiled, marine birds have been collected. At least two oiled sandpipers were seen, as well. The oiled coastline includes sensitive habitat for seabirds, diving birds, shore-birds, wading birds, waterfowl, crabs, seals, and sea lions.

"We've got staff and volunteers watching the beaches, from Monterey to Cape Mendocino," Odemar stated. "That will give us a clearer picture of the true extent of this spill, as we continue our investigation." Both the investigation and clean-up efforts may be hampered by a sizeable storm expected to hit California's coast, sometime today.

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