

Unified Command News Release

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Date: November 8, 1997
Time: 7:30 p.m.

Humboldt Bay Oil Spill Clean-up, Day 4

EUREKA -- Clean-up operations continue around Humboldt Bay, four days after a cement piling punctured a fuel tank of the *M/V Kure* at the Louisiana Pacific Dock. Favorable weather conditions have assisted crews working long days recovering oil and protecting the sensitive ecosystems of the wetlands around Humboldt and Arcata Bays. Because the oil has moved onshore, some of the equipment that was visible on the water in previous days has been released. In their place, shoreline clean-up crews have been increased.

The Coast Guard's re-opening of the bay to vessels inspired many boaters to get out on the water, today. Capt. Harlan Henderson, Captain of the Port, reminded boaters to transit the bay slowly, and consider the entire bay a "no wake zone." Wakes on the water can exacerbate the already difficult task of removing the oil sheen from the water.

Since oiled birds are being seen in greater numbers, much of the focus has shifted to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. To date, 270 oiled birds have been captured and transported to the Marine Wildlife Care Center (MWCC) at Humboldt State University (HSU). The MWCC is operated jointly by HSU and the California Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR), a division of the State Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Of those 270 birds captured, ten died at the facility; another 165 dead, oiled birds have been collected.

Species of affected birds include grebes, murrelets, scoters, loons, shorebirds, scaup, fulmars, and gulls. Eight endangered brown pelicans have been seen with oiled feathers, and another found dead. Among the dead are four marbled murrelets, which are on the State's Endangered Species List and on the Federal Threatened Species List. Another five oiled murrelets have been sighted, and many others were seen near the oil, and therefore at risk of oiling. They are a very fragile species, and extremely vulnerable to environmental disturbances.

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The wildlife operations group includes at least 75 people. Most are government agency staff

and members of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network, which is run by OSPR. About thirty are trained volunteers. Ground crews doing wildlife surveys and recovery include a number of HSU students who were doing wildlife surveys when the spill occurred, and Redwood Sciences Laboratory (U.S. Forest Service) personnel, who were already monitoring the marbled murrelet population.

Wildlife operations include four U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services all-terrain vehicles on coastal beaches, three HSU boats, two DFG air-boats, four vessels owned and operated by the Redwood Sciences Laboratory, and the DFG's twin-engine observation airplane.

“Our goal is to restore wildlife resources to their baseline levels,” said DFG biologist Paul Kelly. “Don’t measure the severity of a spill by the number of bodies. They’re only a short-term indicator. Long term consequences won’t be known for some time.”

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