

Unified Command News Update

Monterey Bay Bird Incident

MEDIA CONTACT: Dana Michaels
TELEPHONE: 408-469-1741

DATE: October 27, 1997
TIME: 6:00 P.M.

For Immediate Release

Santa Cruz, California ---- Rescue work continues at the State Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Oiled Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center, following the discovery of a sticky substance affecting near-shore birds in Monterey Bay, last Friday night. Over 400 distressed birds have been brought to the Center, most by volunteers, with the unknown material matting their feathers.

"Since birds depend on their feathers for insulation against the cold," said DFG Sr. Wildlife Veterinarian Dave Jessup, "these could die of hypothermia, without fast, appropriate care. In addition to hypothermia, the birds will starve. These birds have just completed their fall migration from the arctic, and are stressed and thin to start with."

Volunteers from the Santa Cruz Native Animal Rescue, Friends of the Sea Otter, Monterey and Santa Cruz SPCA, International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC), Peninsula Humane Society, Monterey Bay Aquarium, The Lindsey Museum, the University of California Santa Cruz-Long Marine Lab, and local volunteer veterinarians are working around the clock to treat the sick birds.

Birds are given an electrolyte solution to re-hydrate them, then a nutrient mixture. When they are stabilized, they are washed, dried, and kept warm. Seventy birds have been sent to the IBRRC facility in Berkeley for care and long-term rehabilitation.

"Right now we're conducting an aggressive investigation to identify the material and its source," said U.S. Coast Guard Captain Harlan Henderson, Federal On-scene Coordinator. "We are tracking movement of the material from Coast Guard helicopter overflights and by on-water resources. We're also checking vessels that may have transited the area, and we've spoken with locals, in search of leads."

Monterey Bay Bird Incident News Update
October 27, 1997

Samples of the unidentified substance are being analyzed by the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Laboratory in Groton, Connecticut, and by two DFG laboratories near Sacramento. Initial analysis for public health purposes was performed by the County of Santa Cruz.

A Unified Command has been established by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and U.S. Coast Guard, with support from the Department of Parks and Recreation, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, HAZMAT teams from Watsonville Fire Department and Scotts Valley Fire Department, California Department of Fire and Forestry, and Santa Cruz County Public Health Department.

The public is requested — again — to stay away from wildlife. Injured or distressed animals are unpredictable, and may strike out in self-defense. Trained volunteers are capturing and transporting birds for care. Dead birds should also be left alone, where they are. Removing them will hamper efforts to track the overall impact of this incident.

Anyone with information that may aid the investigation of this incident is encouraged to telephone the Coast Guard Command Duty Officer at 510-437-3073, or CalTIP (Californians Turn In Poachers and Polluters), at 1-888-DFG-CALTIP (334-2258).

Individuals interested in volunteering to help may telephone the volunteer coordinator at 1-888-228-4544.

#