Unified Command
UC Berkeley Diesel Spill
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Creek Cleanup Winding Down

BERKELEY - Officials announced today (Friday, Jan. 13), that the active diesel fuel cleanup effort at Strawberry Creek is winding down as the operation moves to a monitoring and maintenance phase.

That decision was reached by the coordinating agencies and entities involved in the cleanup effort, including the University of California, Berkeley; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Coast Guard, the state Department of Fish and Game; and the City of Berkeley.

During the monitoring phase, authorities will continue to inspect the creek and will address any areas of concern as needed. According to Dave Price, an Environmental Specialist with Fish and Game, "Continuing with additional or more aggressive clean-up efforts may damage the creek's natural habitat more than it would help. At this point letting weathering and the natural flow of the creek remove the last bits of remaining fuel will help the creek recover." Spill booms and sorbents will remain in place to help recover any sheen and fuel that may still be trapped within the creek.

To date, work crews have recovered approximately 1,000 gallons of the 1,650 gallons of diesel fuel that spilled from a malfunctioning emergency generator system in UC Berkeley's Stanley Hall on Dec. 10. Oil spilled down to the basement's storm water pumps and into Strawberry Creek, which runs through campus and the city of Berkeley to San Francisco Bay.

Experts with Fish and Game and the U.S. Coast Guard said an oil spill recovery of 20 percent is successful. In this case, almost 60 percent has been recovered.

A few floating spill booms with absorbent pads likely will remain for several more weeks in some locations along the creek and its San Francisco Bay outfall to capture small amounts of fuel that might still be released from the creek bed. These locations will continue to be closely monitored by the university and the City of Berkeley.

Although natural conditions such as rain flow are expected to remove any residual amounts of fuel from the creek and bay, evidence of the spill, including light sheen of diesel or occasional odors, may be present in some areas for weeks or months, according to agency officials.

Officials said that residents and visitors to the creek should avoid contact with the water until at least one significant storm passes though the region and always wash their hands after any contact with urban creek water.

Environmental experts will continue to monitor the creek's recovery. That information will be posted on UC Berkeley's Strawberry Creek website (http://strawberrycreek.berkeley.edu). Additional updates about the creek will be provided there as well.

Over the last few weeks, officials have noticed clear indicators that the creek is recovering. This includes lightening of the oil sheen's tone, lessening of diesel odor, and the presence of fish and crayfish in portions of the creek that flow through campus. Additional ecological assessments will evaluate the extent of any ecological habitat impacts. No wildlife impacts have been reported.

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