



Diesel Spills in Freshwater Fact Sheet

- Diesel is a relatively light fuel that evaporates fairly quickly compared to heavier oils. It does not usually remain in the environment for more than a few days if it is exposed to sun and air.
- However, diesel can persist in soil or sediment for a longer period of time. Diesel that is trapped in sediment at the bottom of standing water bodies can cause harm to worms, insects, and shellfish that feed off the sediment. Lake bottoms also serve as a breeding ground and food source for animals higher on the food chain. So the entire food chain can be impacted.
- Diesel tends to float on top of the water and affects those animals that spend their time on or at the surface of the water or the surrounding land.
- Diesel coats the feathers of birds, hampering their ability to fly, float and stay warm. The fuel can irritate the eyes, and ingestion of the fuel can kill them.
- Diesel floating on the water also contaminates insects, frogs, reptiles, and fish.
- Plants and grasses that are rooted or float in the water can also become coated by diesel, harming both the plants and the animals that depend on them for food and shelter.
- Fisheries located in freshwater also are subject to the toxic effects. Pollutants can alter a fishery from one that is desirable, such as trout and bass, to a less-desirable, more pollutant-tolerant species like carp.
- Rocks found in and around water bodies serve as homes for mosses, which are an important basic element in a freshwater habitat's food chain. Spilled substances can cover these rocks, killing the mosses and disrupting the local ecology.
- **Note:** Red-dye diesel is a common type that is used in off-road diesel engines, such as bulldozers, backhoes, cranes, bobcats and diesel generators. Red diesel is chemically similar to automotive diesel, but it is less expensive because it is taxed at a lower rate to benefit certain businesses such as agriculture.