



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
OFFICE OF SPILL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



OSPR News Release

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Tarballs wash ashore on central coast

The Department of Fish and Game Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) is responding to scattered oil pollution along the central coast. Since Saturday, an unusual number of weathered tarballs have been reported on the shoreline from San Francisco's Ocean Beach to Asilomar State Beach in Pacific Grove. The source is unknown, and no oiled wildlife has been reported, to date.

Field staff have collected samples of the tarballs, which will be tested by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry at OSPR's Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory in Rancho Cordova. Chemists will analyze the oil "fingerprints" to determine the type of oil and original source. Investigators will use this information in their search for the source of the pollutants. Results of the analysis are expected late next week.

Tarballs are small amounts of oil that, when released into the ocean, solidify to some degree, pick up other floating debris and sand, and become asphalt-like if they're in the water long enough. Most of those found in this case are about the size of marbles. In other cases, they have ranged from pea-sized to patties as much as three feet in diameter. The more weathered tarballs are, the harder and drier they are, and the less likely to stick to birds and other marine life. Once ashore, however, sunshine and relatively warm temperatures can soften and liquefy them and make them a greater hazard to wildlife, pets and people. OSPR staff are monitoring the shoreline for indications of oiled wildlife, and are ready to launch rescue operations if necessary.

Oil contains hazardous chemicals, and the public is reminded to avoid contact with the tarballs. They must be removed from beaches by people with personal protective equipment, and disposed of at a licensed hazardous waste facility.

OSPR also asks anyone with reliable information on the source of this pollution to please call the Department of Fish and Game's CalTIP (Californians Turn In Poachers and Polluters) toll-free hotline, at 888-DFG-CALTip (888-334-2258).

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