

Date: November 19, 1997

Point Reyes Tarball Incident-Update

CONTACT:

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Time: 5:00 p.m.

POINT REYES, Calif. -- State and federal laws mandate that oil spill response in California is directed by a unified command, led by the U.S. Coast Guard and California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). In the current tarball incident at Point Reyes National Seashore, the unified command includes the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary and National Park Service. Sanctuary manager Ed Ueber and Dr. Sarah Allen from the National Park Service, as trustee agents, and the Marin County Office of Emergency Services (OES) are working closely with the unified command.

Less obvious are the non-profit and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local agencies that participate in oil spill clean-up, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, and natural resource restoration.

Organizations supporting the current tarball incident include the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) of Berkeley, the Marine Mammal Center of Sausalito, and WildCare of Marin County. Most of them are members of OSPR's statewide Oiled Wildlife Care Network.

The Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association works in conjunction with the GFNMS to coordinate the Beach Watch Program. Experienced beach surveyors conduct monthly surveys of beaches within the GFNMS, and the northern portion of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Covering the coast from Bodega Head in Sonoma County to Ano Nuevo in San Mateo County, beach surveyors collect data on live and dead birds and mammals, and any significant changes in the beach environment. They are also activated during oil spills, to identify beach impact. Their knowledge of the local beaches and their expertise in bird identification, wildlife and beach assessment, plus OSPR training in tar sampling and collection techniques greatly enhance the response effort.

The Point Reyes Bird Observatory has been lending their expertise to the shoreline clean-up assessment teams, identifying birds and critical bird habitat. Marine Mammal Center

volunteers assist in beach assessment, and WildCare staff and volunteers help with the stabilization and transport of live, oiled birds.

As of this afternoon, wildlife responders have collected 78 live, oiled birds and 220 dead birds; at least 200 birds have been sighted with varying amounts of oil on their feathers, but have not been captured. Many of the birds affected, including common murre, grebes, scoters, and loons, are also known to feed in the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, a sea mount rich in biological diversity north of the Farallon Islands.

The source of the oil is still unknown, and under investigation by both the Coast Guard and DFG-OSPR. The OSPR Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory in Sacramento and the Coast Guard Marine Safety Lab in Groton, Connecticut are performing chemical analyses to help identify possible sources of the tarballs.

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

Point Reyes National Seashore remains open to the public. No beaches have been closed. Park visitors are advised to stay away from oiled wildlife and any oily material they may see. To report oiled wildlife or tarballs, please call 415-663-8525, 800-228-4544, or notify a ranger of its location and the time you saw it.

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