



Unified Command News Release

SAN MATEO MYSTERY OIL SPILL

DATE: December 18, 2001

TIME: 10:30 A.M.

Investigation continues for source of oil

The source of the oil that has affected over 550 northern California seabirds is still under investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office - San Francisco and the State Department of Fish and Game Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR).

State chemists have not yet determined, with certainty, the type of oil that is disabling the birds. At least 19 separate samples of oil have been sent to OSPR's Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory. Oil samples were taken from the feathers of oiled birds, tarballs that have come ashore, and the oil sheen the Coast Guard found near the Farallon Islands, Dec. 8. Of eleven samples analyzed, so far, there is a chemical match for seven feathers, one tarball, and the sheen sample.

The results suggest that the oil plaguing local seabirds is not consistent with oil from the vessel Puerto Rican, which sank off the Golden Gate in 1984. It is also not consistent with oil extracted from Alaska's North Slope.

The Coast Guard is directing daily overflights to search for the oil, weather permitting. The state's Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) is doing small boat recovery work, in search of oiled wildlife. Shoreline assessment teams continue to search the shoreline for evidence of oil and injured wildlife.

Of the oiled birds taken to the San Francisco Bay Oiled Wildlife Care and Education Center in Suisun City (since November 24), 310 were dead on arrival. Another 287 have been brought in alive. Of those 287, 115 are still receiving care; 136 have died, and 36 have been returned to the wild. Most of the birds captured yesterday were found between Half Moon Bay and the Monterey Peninsula.

MEDIA CONTACTS

Lt. Gabrielle McGrath, U.S. Coast Guard: 510-437-3073 — gmcgrath@D11.uscg.mil
Dana Michaels, OSPR Public Affairs: 916-327-9948 — dmichael@ospr.dfg.ca.gov
SF Bay Oiled Wildlife Care & Education Center: 707-207-0380

WEBSITES

DFG-OSPR — <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/Ospr/index.html>
U.S. Coast Guard — <http://www.uscg.mil/D11/index.htm>
Oiled Wildlife Care Network — <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/owcn/default.asp>

