

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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Date: September 22, 1999

To: Coastal Commissioners and Interested Parties

From: Jaime Kooser, Deputy Director.
Alison Dettmer, Manager, Energy & Ocean Resources Unit
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SUBJECT: Dredger *Stuyvesant* oil spill – Update

The Incident

A spill of approximately 2000 gallons (initial estimate) of intermediate-weight fuel oil (IFO 180) occurred at 8:00 p.m., September 6, 1999, from the dredging ship *Stuyvesant*. The vessel, owned by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and operated by Bean Dredging, was approximately 2 km offshore the Humboldt Bay entrance at the time of the accident. Rough seas apparently tossed part of the dredging apparatus against the starboard side of the vessel, slicing through the side shell of the dredger below the water line and cutting an 8-inch-wide hole in its fuel tank.

Area Impacted

The oil tended to drift offshore and then north toward Trinidad Head and Patrick Point. No oil was found in Humboldt Bay. (*Please refer to the September 12 report for details on area initially impacted*). Two reports of tar balls on the beach have since been received. It is not clear at this time if these tar balls are related to the *Stuyvesant* spill.

The Response

Initial response by the agencies (U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, CDFG-OSPR), the responsible party (ACOE) and contractors (FOSS, Marine Spill Response Corporation, Advanced Cleanup Technologies, Inc., Clean Pacific Alliance) brought hundreds of response and cleanup personnel to assist in evaluations and recovery of on-water and on-shore oil and tar balls. On-water recovery of the spilled oil was hampered by inclement seas and weather. Shoreline clean up resulted in the collection of over 90 tons of tar balls and oiled debris. Repeated overflights in the first week of the spill tracked the extent and direction of the oil and tarballs remaining on the water. As the spill response and cleanup advanced, several Coast Guard and other agency response personnel and contractors were demobilized. The last overflight, on September 15, went from Patrick's Point to Arcata Bay and showed no sign of remaining oil or tarballs

on the water; it was agreed that the area of concern was clear. At that point, all marine and air operations ceased.

Wildlife Impacts and Response

A total of 460 dead birds were collected after the spill, 643 oiled live birds were taken in for rehabilitation, and 234 birds died or were euthanized while in care. About 119 birds have been released; 290 remain in care. 550 of the 643 live birds are common murrelets, with pigeon guillemots, surf scoters, rhino auklets, common loons, western gulls and one California brown pelican making up the balance. 24 endangered marbled murrelets are included among those that died. The Wildlife Care Facility at Humboldt State University continues to care for the oiled birds.

A post-release study on common murrelets that were oiled and then rehabilitated during this spill is to be conducted by Scott Newman of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network, a veterinarian and researcher who responds to oil spills and has conducted bird tagging and tracking work as a result of past spills. As part of this *Stuyvesant* post-spill bird study, about 30 rehabilitated murrelets and 30 "control" (un-oiled) murrelets will be fitted with radio transmitters and their long-term survival monitored by wildlife biologists and veterinarians.

More on the proposed study, and on the success of rehabilitation and release of oiled wildlife, will be provided for the Commissioners during the November, 1999 Commission meeting.