

Exxon Valdez oil spill still being studied

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Seventeen years after the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska's Prince William Sound, scientists say the oil spill might have been worse than thought.

The researchers say they've found evidence suggesting remnants of the worst oil spill in U.S. history extend farther into tidal waters than previously determined, increasing the probability the oil is causing unanticipated long-term harm to wildlife.

"This study shows it is very plausible that exposure to Exxon Valdez oil is having a material impact on many shore-dwelling animals and is contributing to their slow recovery...", said Jeffrey Short of the National Marine Fisheries Service in Juneau, Alaska. Short and colleagues say much of the oil is buried in beach sediments and could remain hazardous to wildlife for decades.

The supertanker Exxon Valdez stuck an underwater rock formation March 24, 1989, spilling 11 million gallons of heavy crude oil into the Sound. Short estimates about six miles of shoreline is still affected by the spill and as much as 100 tons of oil lingers hidden in the Sound.

The findings are available online at the Web site of the journal Environmental Science & Technology and are to appear in the June 15 print issue.

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