

# US Navy to pump oil from ship stuck in Philippines

January 24 2013, by Jason Gutierrez

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This photo, taken on January 22, 2013 by Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), shows a coast guard wading through water as he tugs a boat towards the US navy minesweeper, USS Guardian, which remains trapped at the Tubbataha reef off the western island of Palawan after it ran aground on January 17.

The US Navy said Thursday it needed to remove thousands of litres of oil from a minesweeper stuck on World Heritage-listed coral in the

Philippines, warning it was too badly damaged to be towed away.

The 68-metre (224-foot) USS Guardian, which became embedded in the Tubbataha Reef a week ago, will have to be lifted onto another ship or barge, a process that might take another fortnight, said Rear Admiral Thomas Carney.

"The option that we hoped to be able to tow the ship off the reef is not available," said Carney, who heads the [US Navy](#)'s logistics group in the western Pacific.

"It's too badly damaged. It's got hull penetrations in several places, and there's a significant amount of water inside the ship right now."

He said the Guardian had listed after being battered by [huge waves](#), and the most pressing issue was to remove 57,000 litres (15,000 US gallons) of fuel.

"The first priority is to get the fuel out of the ship as soon as possible," Carney told reporters.



This handout photo, taken on January 22, 2013 and released by Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), shows a gov't diver investigating the damage to corals after a US navy minesweeper, the USS Guardian, ran aground on January 17 at the Tubbataha reef, off the western island of Palawan.

Carney described the salvage operation as "a very deliberate, complicated process" involving at least two more US Navy vessels that could take up to two weeks to complete.

"It depends on the [environmental conditions](#) out there as to how safely we can proceed," he said of the timeline.

American divers had been on board to determine the ship's stability, as well as secure or remove crucial equipment inside the vessel to make it lighter for lifting, Carney said.

While Carney said it was too early to determine how much damage the Guardian has caused, the Philippine government reported this week that about 1,000 square metres (3,280 square feet) of coral had already been impacted.

This equates to less than one percent of Tubbataha, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) in a remote part of the Sulu Sea famous for its rich marine life and coral that rivals Australia's [Great Barrier Reef](#).

The incident has stoked anger in the Philippines, with the US Navy yet to explain why it was sailing through a protected marine sanctuary en route to Indonesia.

Under Philippine laws, the sanctuary is off-limits to [ships](#) except for research or tourism approved by the government.

The head of the agency supervising the sanctuary said this week that the captain of the ship ignored warnings that it was nearing the reef. The agency recommended the US Navy be fined for "unauthorised entry" into the area.

Carney declined to explain why the Guardian was sailing in the area, saying that was still the subject of investigation. But he repeated a US Navy apology made last weekend.

"We express our deepest regret that we are in this situation, and we are committed to removing the ship from the reef as soon as possible," he said.

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