

Washington state spill covers 50 birds in used motor oil

March 4 2015

Oil-spill responders on Tuesday are evaluating the impact to wildlife from a used motor oil leak into a river in an agricultural area of south-central Washington, as at least 50 ducks, geese and other waterfowl were observed covered in oil.

As much as 1,500 gallons of used [motor oil](#) stored in an above-ground tank leaked into [irrigation canals](#) and the Yakima River, said Joye Redfield-Wilder, a spokesman for the Department of Ecology based in Yakima.

"We're trying to recover as much oil as we can," she said, adding that officials are concerned about fish and [wildlife](#) in the area.

The leak was reported on Sunday at a former feedlot near Sunnyside, about 175 miles southeast of Seattle. But "no new oil appears to be entering the environment," Redfield-Wilder said.

Crews with the environmental cleanup firm NRC and others have been using absorbent pads, protective booms and vacuum pumps to clean up the oil. The work could take weeks.

Protective booms to contain the oil have been placed along Sulphur Creek where it enters the Yakima River and at a fish hatchery in Prosser. Crews are also using vacuum trucks to recover the oil.

State, local, federal and tribal officials are coordinating efforts.

Sulphur Creek drains into the Yakima River near the Sunnyside State Wildlife Recreation Area, where waterfowl are wintering, Ecology's Joye Redfield-Wilder said. The Yakima River provides habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife, including birds, river otter, beavers and others, she said.

A subcontractor was being hired Tuesday to try to save the birds, and citizens are being asked to report oiled birds but not attempt to handle them, she said.

It's unclear what caused the above-ground storage tank to fail. The [oil](#) was stored in a tank at former feedlot and could have been there for years, Redfield-Wilder said.

The leak flowed through about seven miles of irrigation ditches and canals and about 12 miles down the Yakima River to Prosser.

There's no estimate yet of the cleanup costs.

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Citation: Washington state spill covers 50 birds in used motor oil (2015, March 4) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-washington-state-birds-motor-oil.html>

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