

Blame game in Greece as oil spill spreads to Piraeus port

September 13 2017, by John Hadoulis



Oil quickly covered beaches and coves on the southeastern side of Salamis

Greek officials traded accusations Wednesday after an oil spill from a sunken tanker spread to the Athens port of Piraeus.

The 45-year-old vessel Agia Zoni II sank on Sunday near the island of Salamis while under anchor but the cause is still not known.

"This is a major environmental disaster," said Salamis mayor Isidora Nannou-Papathanassiou, whose island is suffering the brunt of the damage from the slick.

"Clearly the danger (of pollution) was not estimated correctly," Nannou-Papathanassiou told state television ERT. "The currents moved the oil spill."

The Greek-flagged tanker was carrying around 2,500 tonnes of fuel, some of which quickly covered beaches and coves on the southeastern side of the island, opposite Athens and Piraeus, the country's biggest port.

Merchant Marine Minister Panagiotis Kouroubliis insisted this week that all necessary action had been taken, and that the ship's hull had been secured against further leakage.

"There is no risk of further seepage. The oil leaked as the ship was sinking. All necessary steps have been taken," Kouroubliis told Real FM radio.

But on Tuesday night, the oil reached the shores of Piraeus.

The main opposition New Democracy party said the authorities had "lost valuable time" in containing the oil spill on Sunday before it spread.

Panagiotis Hatziperos, deputy regional governor of the Saronic island group which includes Salamis, agreed.

"The (seriousness of the) incident was not correctly identified at first," Hatziperos told ERT on Wednesday, blaming the merchant marine ministry and the coastguard for the inadequate response.



Oil has covered beaches on Salamis island

"I have asked the owners of the ship to put six times more resources in the area," he said.

The Salamis mayor said that immediately after the incident, "the main effort was concentrated on sealing the ship's hold and discover people possibly trapped inside".

The only people on board at the time, the tanker's captain and chief engineer, were charged with negligence and released pending trial.

'Avoid the area'

Greek authorities could not say how much fuel remains on board.

On Tuesday, the coastguard said barriers had been erected to contain the spill and tanker trucks were being used to collect the oil.

On Wednesday, the coastguard said anti-pollution measures would intensify.

"There are three private cleanup vessels, one coastguard vessel and two more may come later today," a coastguard spokeswoman told AFP.

Local officials said fishermen had been told to avoid the area. Coastal businesses in the area have also shut down, the Salamis mayor said.

She added that her office planned to submit lawsuits on behalf of coastal restaurants losing business owing to the spill.

Salamis lies just off the port of Piraeus and the Eleusis shipyards and oil refineries, one of the most polluted areas in Greece.

The [sewage treatment plant](#) of Psyttalia is also near the location where the tanker sank.

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