

Oil cleanup begins after cargo ships collide off Corsica

October 8 2018



French police released a photo showing the Tunisian-operated Ulysee cargo ship, left, after it rammed the Cyprus-based CLS Virginia near Corsica on Sunday

French and Italian ships raced Monday to contain a spreading oil spill

after two cargo ships collided off the Mediterranean island of Corsica, as French authorities launched an investigation for "maritime pollution".

French Environment Minister Francois de Rugy was due to fly to the area to "ascertain the damage, and see what measures are being implimented to contain potential pollution," his staff said.

The accident occurred early Sunday when a Tunisian freighter rammed into a Cyprus-based vessel that was anchored about 30 kilometres (20 miles) off the northern tip of the French island.

The ship's hull was pierced and at least one fuel tank began leaking into the sea off the holiday island of Corsica. It was earlier mistakenly reported that the pollution affected the nearby Cap Corse and Agriate marine reserve.

An estimated 40 to 200 cubic metres (1,400 to 7,000 cubic feet) has spread into the park, authorities said.

Both France and Italy have sent two boats to the site, where an inflatable boom has been deployed to stop the spread of a slick which now stretches some 20 kilometres (12 miles).

Another boat from each country was due to join them shortly and clean-up operations were expected to last several days.

"Pushed by the wind, the spill has spread and is breaking up", a spokesman for maritime authorities said Monday.

It was not immediately clear if fuel was still leaking from the Cyprus-based CLS Virginia, and officials were still evaluating how to separate the two ships and bring them to port.

An investigation has been launched for "pollution" brought on by a "maritime accident", Marseille prosecutor Xavier Tarabeux said.

Writing on Twitter, Corsica leader Gilles Simeoni said he was determined to find what caused the accident, which occurred in relatively calm seas with good visibility.

He also called for "absolute vigilance in preventing eventual pollution."

The wind was pushing the spill toward the northwest away from the French island which is known for its pristine waters and tourist beaches.

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