

Spill of 1,200 barrels of crude blight Ecuadoran beach

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Members of the Ecuadoran Armed Forces stand guard on the shore of a beach covered with oil after a leak in Esmeraldas province on July 19, 2023.

A leak at an oil terminal spilled at least 1,200 barrels of crude onto a beach popular with tourists in northwest Ecuador, near the border with

Colombia, officials said Thursday.

The leak occurred on Wednesday and oil spread out four kilometers (2.5 miles) from the Balao terminal, reaching Las Palmas [beach](#), Environment Minister Jose Antonio Davalos told broadcaster Ecuavisa.

He said [crabs](#) and fish have been found covered in oil, and there were "most likely birds as well."

State company Petroecuador, to whom the terminal belongs, would compensate fishermen left high and dry by the [spill](#), the minister added.

The [leak](#) has been stopped, said Petroecuador official Rafael Armendariz.

The beach, in the province of Esmeraldas, has been closed to visitors as Petroecuador is engaged in a massive cleanup, nearly complete, of the sand and surrounding water.

As for the cause: "We do not rule out any hypothesis, whether it was mechanical damage, whether it was an operational problem, negligence or even sabotage," said Petroecuador general manager Ramon Correa.

Oil is the South American country's top export—generating some \$13 billion per year.

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