



### **Liaison Update #3**

UPDATE: 7/15/2022

**OES Report # 22-2410:** Updated 5/23/22

#### **INCIDENT INFORMATION**

Date of Incident: Thursday, April 28, 2022

Name of Incident: Smith River Incident

Location: Gasquet, Del Norte County

Product details: Asphalt Binder

#### **INCIDENT BACKGROUND**

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, a tanker truck carrying asphalt binder overturned and spilled an estimated 3,000 gallons along the roadway of Highway 199 near Gasquet, some of which flowed into the adjacent Smith River. Asphalt binder is a heavy semi-solid petroleum product used as a glue to hold a road together.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR), Caltrans, U.S. Forest Service and other agencies initially responded to facilitate cleanup at the time of the incident. Earthen dams were constructed to impede flow of the material to the river and limited impacts to the river were observed at the time. The spilled product solidified in water and on the bank due to cold temperature.

Weather, terrain, and the challenging nature of the product and environment (stuck hard to the rocky and gunnite bank) has hampered cleanup over the last several weeks and some operations were temporarily suspended due to safety concerns. Shoreline monitoring continued, as weather permitted. Additionally, it has taken time for responding agencies and contractors to develop potentially effective strategies to remove the product from the environment.

The Liaison Officer and Tribal Liaison continue to coordinate with tribes in the area.

OSPR and other Trustee Agencies will be engaged for the long term to manage and complete the response, long term monitoring and any other remediation that may be required. It is anticipated that tarballs and mats will continue to become visible as water levels fall, so the response may need to return to areas that we have previously cleaned. Unfortunately, not all

of the product is accessible from the shoreline and there are significant environmental tradeoffs associated with more aggressive cleanup strategies in areas of high-quality native habitat and/or along the bottom of the river itself that the Unified Command will need to consider in approving cleanup endpoints that maximize the benefit and minimize the damage associated with continued cleanup operations.

## **OPERATIONAL AND SHORELINE CLEAN UPDATE**

As of July 13, crews completed all cleanup at the spill site and completed the fortification of gunite along the river shoreline. Dive crews are conducting underwater surveys to assess any submerged oil relating to the incident. As the water level continues to lower with drought conditions, cleanup contractors are picking up additional material.

OSPR Environmental Scientists continue to perform surveys this week. Cleanup operations and site sign-offs are summarized below:

- Signoff of the spill site occurred 7/6/22 and the contractor has reapplied shotcrete to the slope. Before and after pictures are found below.
- Two teams of Ancon Services contractors continue to recover tarballs and patties from the shoreline from the spill site downstream to the Hwy 101 bridge. Oil continues to be recovered as the river recedes exposing gravel bars for search and collection of spilled material.
- Dive contractor Monterey Bay Diving arrived 7/13/2022 and has assessed sunken oil from the spill site downstream to Myrtle Creek Beach, confirmed and recovered sunken oil from several holes. Additional dive surveys will continue downriver to the mouth.
- Several of the downriver gravel bars have had sequential cleaning operations and are nearing cleanup endpoints. Cleanup crews will remain in the area until final sign off of these sites.
- No cleanup has occurred west of the Highway 101 bridge yet and the Tribe will be coordinated and consulted with ahead of these operations.



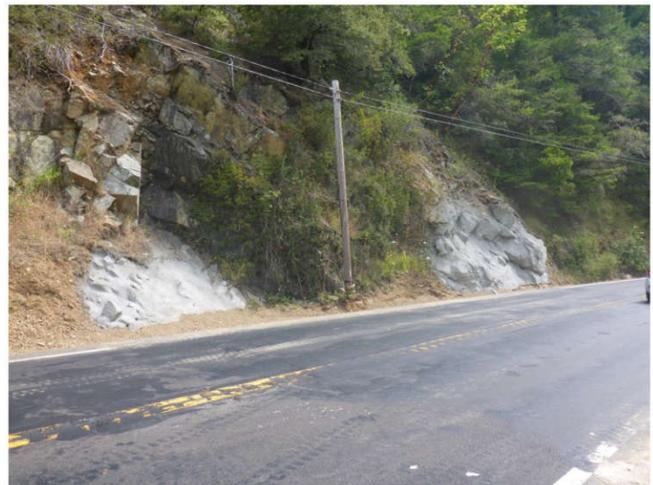
Spill Site - #1: View from Highway 199 looking down the slope at the Smith River.



Spill Site - #2: View from Highway 199 looking downhill at the Smith River.



Spill Site - #3: View from the riverbank looking uphill toward Highway 199.



Spill Site - #4 – View from Highway 199 looking back at the shoulder.

## SAFETY

All response personnel continue to abide by COVID-19 protocols, as outlined by Del Norte County and the CDC. Work along the roadway, work down in the canyon and water flow rates in the Smith River continue to pose potential safety hazards for response workers, which can limit operations.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Shoreline oiling and the success of the cleanup operations is being assessed through the Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Technique (SCAT; <https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-and-chemical-spills/oil-spills/resources/shoreline-cleanup-and-assessment-technique-scat.html>). Response teams are assessing the impacts on foot and by boat to locate tarballs/tar patties and recommend cleanup strategies. Following cleanup operations, the SCAT teams return to each area to verify attainment of the cleanup objectives. The map attached to the bottom of this update shows the spill area from the point of the accident to the downstream-most observation of oil with representative photos collected by the SCAT teams of the observed oiling. The graphic below outlines the general oil fate and strategies for this incident.

**Smith River Incident – Oil Fate and Strategies**

**INCIDENT INFORMATION**  
A truck carrying asphalt binder crashed, spilling the contents onto the highway. The product then flowed to the riverbank and into the Smith River. Different strategies are being implemented to address the spill site and product that is appearing on shorelines downstream.

**SPILL SITE**  
The product quickly solidified in the cold weather along the shoreline. Earthen dams were constructed to impede flow of the material to the river and responders began to remove product from the shoreline. Warm weather increased the stickiness of the product on the shoreline, but no sheen has been observed at this time. Strategies to remove the remaining product from the shoreline will prioritize responder safety and attempt to minimize potential erosion impacts.

**DOWNSTREAM**  
In the cold water, the product solidified and sunk. In solid form, the product remained hidden from view in the deeper portions of the river. A storm increased flow and turbulence within the water which remobilized the solid product and broke it into smaller pieces. The current then carried these small pieces (tarballs) down river.

As the tarballs moved downstream, turbulence within the river broke up the product into smaller tar balls, which were deposited onto shorelines. After the storm, flows reduced, and air temperatures increased. Tar balls deposited on the shorelines were heated by the warm weather and turned sticky. Responders are conducting Shoreline Cleanup Assessments to determine shoreline oiling and appropriate cleanup methods. The Unified Command is also evaluating safe and effective strategies for assessing the extent of the sunken oil and methods for potentially removing it from the river bottom.

Report tarballs to [tarballreports@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:tarballreports@wildlife.ca.gov)

**Logos:** EPA, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Water Resources, and another agency logo.

## WILDLIFE IMPACTS

OSPR has coordinated with the Oiled Wildlife Care Network to deploy trained wildlife responders as needed. Anyone observing oiled wildlife should not attempt to capture it.

Instead, please report observations of oiled wildlife to the oiled wildlife hotline at 1-877-UCD-OWCN (1-800-823-6926).

## **NRDA**

A Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) is a process that determines the amount of restoration necessary to restore the resources and compensate for injuries and losses to wildlife, habitat, and human use losses caused by spills. In this incident the Trustee Agencies include the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife –Office of Spill Prevention and Response (CDFW-OSPR), and California Department of Parks and Recreation. The trustees work cooperatively with the Responsible Party to identify the extent of natural resource injuries and determine if a damage assessment is applicable.

## **TAR BALLS**

On May 26, 2022, the Unified Command approved fliers for distribution and posting along the response area. There have been no significant environmental impacts due to the product's hardened chemical characteristics, but it still contains petroleum and should be cleaned up only by trained professionals. If you observe tarballs, please do not pick them up and report the sighting to [tarballreports@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:tarballreports@wildlife.ca.gov) If you can, please provide as much information as possible in the email:

- 1) Date the oil was observed
- 2) Time the oil was observed
- 3) Specific location of the observed oil (preferably GPS coordinates)
- 4) A few descriptive photographs of the oil
- 5) Estimated quantity
- 6) Contact information for follow-up

A tarball fact sheet in both English and Spanish can be found at the following location:  
<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=29232&inline>

## **MEDIA**

Media inquiries can be directed to CDFW-OSPR Public Information Officer Eric Laughlin at 916 214-3279. More information will be shared when it becomes available.