

American Trader ship crude oil spill, CA

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Introduction

On February 7th, 1990, the American Trader oil tanker caused a huge oil spill near Huntington Beach in California. The accident had many impacts on the people in and around California as well as the wildlife and environment. There were a lot of efforts being done in response to the spill at every government level. There were many lessons learned throughout the cleanup process and this incident showed the amount of time and energy that should be put into cleaning up oil spills.



Figure 1. Location of spill⁷

Cause

How could this happen? Well, it turns out the tanker was still in the shallow water outside of Huntington Beach when it ended up running over its own anchor attempting to unload its contents at an underwater pipeline, puncturing its hull which led to the spilling of oil into the ocean near California.⁷



Figure 2. The assumed cause of the spill⁷



Figure 3. Shows the American Trader ship⁶

Impacts

- Thousands of birds, fish, and other marine animals died
- 15 miles of orange county beaches were polluted and 60 square miles of open water
- Oil began to come to shore in light concentrations
- Recreational fishing stopped due to possible fish contamination
- Exposed rocky shorelines, bluffs, and riprap in the area of the Bolsa Chica Bluffs, Newport Finger Piers, and Santa Ana River jetties were heavily oiled
- All beaches in Orange County Closed down
- Tourism began to die down
- Businesses began to decline as a result of less tourists

Legal Actions¹

- British Petroleum, Attransco, Golden West Refining Co.
- Divided into two components – Biological & Recreational
- The recreational component of the case went to trial, where a jury award was eventually settled for \$11.6 million
- The biological component of the case was settled out of court for \$3.45 million for bird and fish-related injuries, plus an additional \$360,000 for water monitoring projects.

Response

- The effectiveness and shortness of cleanup were due to good planning, fast response, availability of oil spill recovery equipment, favorable weather, and cooperation between the government and the responsible company⁹
- The beaches were cleaned with sorbent booms and shovels
- The rest of the cleanup was performed with low-pressure cold water flushing and high-pressure hot water spraying⁹
- Started testing soil, water, and air for contamination
- Temporary patches were applied to the ship to prevent more oil from spilling
- The ship was moved to San Francisco on February 18th for repair
- The International Bird Rescues response team constructed a wildlife response center at Terminal Island near the port of Los Angeles⁸
- An intake station, accepting all birds, was immediately set up at a Huntington Beach lifeguard station.⁸
- The beaches were cleaned by March 2nd⁸



Figure 4. Bird rescue intake⁸



Figure 5. Beach Cleanup⁷



Figure 6. A crew adjusts a boom to keep an oil spill out of a marsh area in Huntington Beach¹⁰

Conclusion

Overlooking the response from all parties involved, there were many lessons learned. Such as that there is a need for joint oil spill planning and a need for a joint command center for these instances. Another is the need to plan for volunteers and the vital role of local governments.

References

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