



Tanker and Barge Collision in New Orleans, LA Update July 24, 1000 EDT

Updates

- Afternoon aerial reconnaissance yesterday showed heavy oiling at River Mile 50 and patches of oil as far as Mile 30, nearly 70 miles downriver from the collision site.
- Heavy shoreline impacts have been observed and oil continues to move down river, with the leading edge expected to reach the Gulf of Mexico early today. A first-light overflight is planned.



Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, approximately 3 miles down river of the collision site. Note the ineffective boom across the mouth of the canal. LOSCO Photo

- Over 250 workers and 11,000 feet of booming have been deployed. These numbers will likely grow significantly during the next few days.
- Despite efforts to hold the barge in place, the ruptured barge has drifted downstream several hundred yards and is wrapped around a support to the Crescent City Bridge.
- Four additional NOAA support staff are en-route to assist with conducting shoreline surveys, provide information management support, and assess biological impacts. This makes a total of 6 ORR staff on site.
- The river remains closed to marine traffic and may remain closed for several days. Over 60 ships are waiting to transit the closed area and the queue is expected to grow. The size of the closure was increased to over 85 miles of the lower Mississippi River
- Preliminary chemical information on the oil shows that the oil is near the density of water but that it will float. However, as the oil weathers and picks up sediment it may become heavy enough to sink.

- Drinking water intakes are a concern in New Orleans and the down river communities. Most have a day or less of water in storage. Sinking oil would increase concerns about drinking water intakes.
- River levels are slowly dropping, increasing the potential for stranding oil.
- Shoreline assessment activities are being planned. Some 100 miles of shoreline may need to be surveyed and prioritized for cleanup. NOAA personnel are helping to organize this effort.
- Efforts to initiate a natural resource damage assessment in coordination with other trustees continue. NOAA Mussel Watch data have been acquired for possible use as reference baseline.
- NOAA Incident Response Coordinator gave a brief interview yesterday to a Times Picayune reporter about NOAA's role in responding to the oil spill.
- A NOAA Incident News web site was opened yesterday to provide information on the incident to the public (<http://www.incidentnews.gov/incident/7861>).

Background in Incident

Situation Overview:

Early yesterday morning (7/23/08) a 600-foot chemical tanker and 200-foot fuel barge collided near downtown New Orleans, LA. The collision tore the barge "DM932" in half, discharging an estimated 419,000 gallons of #6 fuel oil, viscous tar-like oil. Tug boats are holding the halves of the barge in place. The barge had just loaded the oil at Stone Oil Co. in Gretna, across the river from the accident site, and was on its way to Memphis. The double-hulled tanker "Tintomara," loaded with styrene and biodiesel and outbound for Europe, had only minor damage and did not spill any material. The accident is under investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Transportation Safety Board.



Tugs holding sections of the ruptured barge just upstream of the Crescent City Bridge. USCG Photo

The NOAA Scientific Support Team responded to the incident in support of the U.S. Coast Guard Federal On-Scene Coordinator. In situations like this NOAA promotes better decision making by predicting the trajectory of spilled oil, identifying sensitive natural resources, observing the location of oil from helicopters, conducting damage assessment studies, and providing a range of other scientific services. The NOAA Support Team in Seattle was notified approximately 3 am PDT, and quickly prepared a trajectory forecast of the spilled oil. The team also began collecting weather and river current information. OR&R has also activated 2 response contractors to assist with information management and natural resource issues. All information and products are

summarized in NOAA's ResponseLINK <<https://responselink.orr.noaa.gov/login>> bulletin board. Anyone with a NOAA email account can log into this system for more complete and updated information.

As of yesterday evening, twenty-nine miles of the Mississippi River were closed to vessel traffic, shutting down the Port of New Orleans through which over 6000 vessels transit annually. The river could remain closed for days to allow for salvage of the barge and cleanup. More than 30 vessels are already waiting to transit through the affected area. In addition, the ferries that cross the river between New Orleans' west bank and the French Quarter and one that runs from Chalmette to the west bank could not operate because of the closure. By early evening the leading edge of the oil had spread some 60 miles downstream. This means that the oil may reach the Gulf of Mexico by morning.

The spill has also affected the water supplies for New Orleans and other downstream communities. Water intakes and sensitive environmental areas downriver from the spill were boomed off to keep the fuel oil out. Many water intakes were closed out of caution and testing has begun, but water quality testing even with rapid turn-around can take 24 hours. Most communities have only a day or less of water in storage.

NOAA Staffing Plan:

The Regional SSC and Assistant SSC are on-scene. Two additional support staff are also on-scene. The OR&R Regional Assessment and Restoration Coordinator has also been activated and is working with the other federal and state resource management agencies. Three OR&R staff in Seattle are on standby to travel. The SSC for the Great Lakes is on standby and two additional OR&R staff in travel status in the New Orleans region working on Hurricane Katrina recovery projects have been notified.

Next Steps:

The NOAA team will continue to assist the USCG in tracking the spill. The spilled oil is persistent and little is expected to evaporate. At this point the fate of the oil is uncertain and if light winds persist the oil may spread as far as the Head of Passes near the outlet of the Mississippi River. As the oil moves down river it will encounter increasingly sensitive environmental areas. As the spill strands along the river banks the NOAA Team will begin to conduct systematic shoreline assessments to support cleanup decision-making.

Longer Term Issues:

Currently the Assessment and Restoration Division has engaged their Regional Resource Coordinator (RRC) in Baton Rouge and various field and HQ staff in support of environmental assessment activities. NOAA, as a Trustee for natural resources that may be impacted as a result of the barge incident release is working in coordination with other State and Federal Trustees to conduct a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA). The trustee team will identify, document and quantify injuries to natural resources and services, and determine appropriate restoration activities that will compensate the public for any loss of natural resources resulting from the spill.

Potential areas of consideration for Trustee assessment activities include Mississippi River surface waters and associated aquatic fauna, shoreline habitats such as marshes, sand flats and sensitive wooded wetland habitats, birds, wildlife, and recreational impacts potentially associated with the release. The NOAA RRC in Louisiana is currently coordinating with Trustees in planning preassessment activities, and will travel on-scene later today or tomorrow to initiate field activities and to coordinate with the ongoing response.

Following the November 2000 M/V Westchester grounding incident that resulted in the release of 550,000 gallons of Nigerian crude oil at Mile Marker 38, Trustees quantified injuries to freshwater vegetative, delta marsh, rip rap and sand flat habitats, birds, wildlife and recreational services. The NRDA resulted in a series of marsh enhancement and recreational projects that were implemented to compensate the public (<http://www.darrp.noaa.gov/southeast/westchester/pdf/westdarpfnl.pdf>). Although the fate and effects of the oil from this release will vary from previous incidents, useful information about the type of assessment, type and duration of injuries, recovery rates and project types may be informative here.