

Community Information: Health & Safety Advisories

Oil Spill in Swanson Creek's Marsh & Patuxent River

News from the Unified Response's Joint Information Center

Joint Information Center: 1 (972) 797-2527

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO)

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Drinking Water

Your water is safe! State and county agencies assessed the potential for underground water contamination in areas along the Patuxent River. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and local health departments from the counties of Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's did this assessment. Individual water supplies and public water wells have not been impacted by residual accumulations of oil from the recent spill. Residents of the region can confidently rely on the fact that their water wells and community supplies remain safe to drink.

All wells are far enough from the affected waterways that we don't expect the spill to impact them in the future. And most wells are in deep, confined aquifers that are not connected to surface waters. The survey found no evidence that drinking water aquifers connect with the surface water in areas hit by the spill. Shallow groundwater in this region moves away from the wells and toward the river. Because of this, the shallow aquifers won't carry river pollution to the wells.

If you have a well that's in a shallow or unconfined aquifer, or, if your well is structurally flawed (cracks in casing or incomplete grout) you can have your water tested for free. While it isn't likely that the spill impacts your well, the following County Health Departments can check for spill-related contaminants.

Please call:

Calvert (410) 535-3922
Charles (301) 609-6751

Prince George's (301) 883-7681
St. Mary's (301) 475-4321

For additional information, contact MDE's Office of Residential Sanitation at (800) 633-6101, x3778 or (410) 631-3778.

Precautionary Fish Advisory

The Maryland Department of the Environment issued an advisory which recommends that you not harvest fish or crabs found in areas of the Patuxent River wherever the presence of petroleum products has been observed. MDE's advisory applies to both recreation and commercial fishing. This is NOT a ban, and no penalties apply. People can identify these areas by looking for a sheen on the surface, oil on the beach, or the smell of petroleum.

Some of the ingredients in petroleum products can have human health impacts. During a period of continuing exposure, fish can accumulate these substances in their bodies. MDE states that eating fish

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from waters impacted by the oil spill could cause a potential threat to people's health. To view the actual advisory, please visit the MDE website: www.mde.state.md.us MDE states that its advisory is justified by the possible risk of contamination. This MDE advisory will continue until further notice.

Since less than five percent of the fish and crabs harvested in Maryland come from the Patuxent River, MDE's advisory should not have an effect on commercial seafood availability.

Precautionary Beach Advisory

The Maryland Department of the Environment also issued a beach advisory. It recommends that citizens use common sense in areas impacted by the spill. At this time, residents should not use beaches and shorelines impacted by the spill for recreational purposes. Pets and livestock should not be allowed access to areas contaminated by the spill. If contact should occur, oil can be removed with a mild detergent. New advisories will be issued as additional information becomes available. You can view the actual MDE advisory at their website: www.mde.state.md.us

Harvesting Bans on Shellfish

MDE has closed oyster and clam beds in the Patuxent River that lie north of the Thomas Johnson Bridge on Route 4. This emergency ban on harvesting will keep people from eating oil-polluted shellfish. Oysters and clams can take up the oil in the water. When the exposure ends, these shellfish will naturally purge themselves of the oil. To view the actual MDE advisory, visit their website: www.mde.state.md.us

Temporary Safety Zone

The main channel of the Patuxent River is open to vessel traffic. However, vessels should proceed with caution and take care to produce minimum wakes so as not to interfere with ongoing cleanup operations.

Due to the oil spill, there's a temporary safety zone established on the Patuxent River. This safety zone is bordered by Chalk Point and God's Grace Point to the north. The southern boundary of the safety zone runs from Captain Point and the southern tip of Broomes Island. This safety zone is patrolled. Creeks that are boomed are within the safety zone. Boaters are prohibited from jumping boom, and violators are subject to a \$25,000 fine.

All vessels and persons are prohibited from entering this zone, except as authorized by the Coast Guard Captain of the Port in Baltimore, Maryland. If you need to enter or pass through the safety zone, you must request authorization by calling the Captain of the Port (or his designated representative). Reach him by phone at (410) 576-2963 or by radio on VHF-FM channel 81 or 16.