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A Waterfowl Doomed by the Big Oil Spill in San Francisco Bay (Page 5)

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The Week's News in Review

BAY AREA

Ecological Catastrophe

All over the world last week, oil had become a sticky issue — nationally, in the case of the projected Alaska pipeline (see Page 8), and internationally, in Indonesia and the troubled Middle East (see Page 13). Near Dover on the English coast, 60 miles of beaches were covered in black sludge washed ashore in the wake of a collision between two ships in the English channel.

For Bay Area residents — many of whom could smell it when the wind was wrong — oil had brought trouble very close to home. The normally steel-blue surface of the bay, was blotched with slimy streaks and globules. Far north into Marin and as far south as the San Mateo coast, beaches were fouled and birds and other wildlife were mired, sometimes fatally, in the oil-mottled waters.

Foggy Blanket

The ecological catastrophe began a couple of hours after midnight last Monday morning, when San Francisco lay sleeping under a cottony blanket of zero-visibility fog, reminiscent of a London pea-souper. On the bay, almost no traffic was moving — except for the incoming Arizona Standard, homeward bound about a quarter-mile west of the Golden Gate, and the outward bound Oregon Standard.

Both vessels were 523-foot, 17,000-ton tankers owned by the Standard Oil Company, far and away the largest shipper of oil in the region. (Last year it had brought in 432 ships, compared to 31 by Humble Oil and 45 by Texaco.) Standard Oil, remarked a San Francisco Marine Ex-

change spokesman, ran its ships in and out of port "almost like a taxi service."

At 1:45 a.m., the Arizona Standard, bringing a cargo of crude oil to company refineries across the bay, rammed blindly into the Oregon Standard, carrying out 100,000 barrels of bunker fuel — a lightly refined fuel oil. The Arizona was carved up by the collision; and from the huge gash it had made in the hull of the Oregon, a great gush of bunker oil spilled into the bay.

The Coast Guard cutter Point Barrow, two patrol boats, a hovercraft and four barges helped shepherd the

leaking tanker from the Golden Gate to a mooring west of Angel Island. Clean-up operations began immediately, long before daybreak. But by sunup Monday, the bay was striated with shiny black and green tentacles of slime — and the damage was spreading.

Standard officials, who said they had no idea how the accident happened, did not expect to have figures on the exact amount of the spill "until all the gauges and records have been checked." The Coast Guard, however, called it "a major spill" which might have dumped as much as 1.8 million gallons

of bunker oil into the bay, from which much of it had been carried by strong currents out the Golden Gate to wreak more havoc farther afield.

Some conservationists feared that Bolinas Lagoon, a natural sanctuary purchased over several years at a cost of \$750,000, was now "pretty much lost" as a result of the oil spillage — probably a larger one than the leakage at Santa Barbara two years ago, when an undetermined amount between 342,000 and 800,000 gallons had escaped in an undersea drilling blowout, and possibly the largest in history.

The Bird Problem

Scores of uncoordinated volunteers rushed to the rescue of oil-soaked waterfowl, sometimes in their zest doing more harm than good by frightening the birds back in the water, where they sank and drowned. But emergency stations were saving hundreds of others, which had some chance of survival if they could be prevented from ingesting the poisonous fuel (bunker oil, according to experts, was more ecologically damaging than crude oil) and could be sheltered, after cleansing, until their feathers regained their own natural oil.

Anonymous vandals smeared crude oil on the walls and entry of the Standard skyscraper on lower Market, and dumped dead fish and oil into its public garden pond. More constructively, the California Regional Water Quality Control

Board formally ordered Standard to clean up all floating and deposited oil — which in fact the company was already doing, with the help of its own employees and volunteers, who attacked the worst deposits with straw, pitchforking the straw out of the water when it had soaked up the oil. (How the oil-soaked straw would be disposed of was unsolved at midweek.)

Though the largest slicks of oil, by midweek, were eddying the confluence of tides outside the Golden Gate, some of it by then had figuratively found its way home — clear across to the East Bay, site of Standard's Richmond refineries. The Red Rock Yacht Harbor at Point Richmond reported that approximately 100 boats at anchor there had been stained by a "heavy" oil slick.

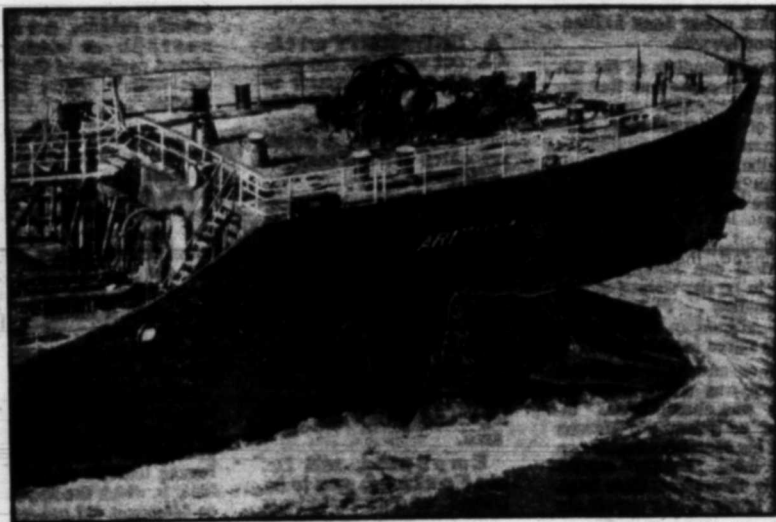
A formal Coast Guard investigation of the causes was indefinitely recessed almost as soon as it started, while officials waited for word from Washington on whether representatives of the Sierra Club and the Save San Francisco Bay Association were entitled to attend, as they requested, in the role of advocates of the public interest.

And in Washington, U. S. Senator Alan Cranston (Dem-Calif.) urged swift congressional action on two pending bills, one authorizing the Coast Guard to guide ships in harbors, the other requiring installation, and use, of ship-to-ship radio-telephone communications on all vessels engaged in inland shipping.



YOUNG VOLUNTEERS RAKE OIL-SOAKED STRAW ON A SAN FRANCISCO BEACH
Bigger than Santa Barbara, perhaps the biggest oil spill ever

UPI Telephoto



AP Wirephoto

THE ARIZONA STANDARD HEADS FOR ITS RICHMOND DOCK AFTER THE CRASH
Standard Oil's tankers operated a "taxi service"