


Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms


 Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

By Emilie Ritter

HELENA, Montana | Tue Jul 5, 2011 4:37pm EDT

(Reuters) - Environmental officials scrambled on Tuesday to assess the extent of contamination from a weekend oil spill that has fouled water supplies and ranch lands along a scenic and otherwise pristine stretch of the Yellowstone River in Montana.

An Exxon Mobil pipeline ruptured on Friday night about 150 miles downstream from Yellowstone National Park near the town of Laurel, Montana, just southwest of Billings, dumping up to 1,000 barrels, or 42,000 gallons, of crude oil into the flood-swollen river.

Toxic fumes from the oil overcame a number of people who reported breathing problems and dizziness and were taken to local hospitals. But state and federal officials on Tuesday said they lacked a tally of health problems or the number of riverside homes that were evacuated after the accident.

The spill also has wreaked havoc on ranching and farming operations along the Yellowstone, the longest river without a dam in the United States, which provides irrigation and drinking water for communities along its banks.

Jerry Williams, who raises livestock, wheat, alfalfa and hay on some 800 acres of land around Laurel, said high water from the river has washed oil across much of his property.

"It was the night the river peaked, so the river water was flooded all over the place, and that brought oil all over both ranches," he told Reuters. "All of our grasslands ... have just thick, black crude stuck to all the grass, trees, low lands."

Williams said his spring wheat crop and alfalfa are both in need of irrigation, but farmers in the area were advised not to take water from the river for the time being. Drinking supplies also are in limbo, he said.

"We get all our drinking water from our wells and for our animals," Williams said. "We don't know if we'll be able to use them since the river was high. All the groundwater, I assume, is probably contaminated. We just don't know."

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer said on Tuesday he has told Exxon and federal agencies overseeing the spill response that the state alone will decide when the cleanup is done.

"The state of Montana is going to stay on this like the smell on a skunk," he told Reuters by telephone as he toured areas hit by the spill.






Related News

[TransCanada says Exxon spill no threat to XL line](#)

3:53pm EDT

[Montana governor reviewing oil, gas pipeline safety](#)

Mon, Jul 4 2011

[Montana leak may alter Exxon safety reviews: exec](#)

Mon, Jul 4 2011

[UPDATE 2-Montana leak may alter Exxon safety reviews-exec](#)

Mon, Jul 4 2011

[Exxon Mobil says oil leaked into Yellowstone River](#)

Sun, Jul 3 2011

Analysis & Opinion

[5 more beachfront resort areas with hot real estate deals](#)

[Kabul : The hotel on the hill](#)

Related Topics

[U.S.](#) »

State and federal authorities had few answers to questions about the extent of oil pollution or the potential impacts on human health.

Environmental experts said it will likely take months, even years, for the ecosystem to rebound from the influx of crude.

"It will be unclear even next spring as to what kind of recovery has taken place," said Ronald Kendall, chairman of the department of environmental toxicology at Texas Tech University and head of its Institute of Environmental and Human Health.

"It's a very significant amount of oil moving downstream right now, and oil is a toxic substance in itself," he said. "A whole suite of organisms, from mink to herons to sturgeon to dragonflies, are going to be affected as waves of oil come through."

Concerns about petroleum contamination prompted downstream communities that rely on the river for drinking water to shut off their intake valves, but it was unclear whether residents who depend on well water had been urged to avoid drinking it.

Many state health and emergency workers had been told to direct inquiries about environmental contamination and health concerns to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA officials said on Tuesday that readings were not yet available from air and water monitors mostly downstream of the spill.

Some Montana residents have reported symptoms ranging from shortness of breath to fainting spells linked to exposure to petroleum-based chemicals.

Stacy Anderson said on Tuesday her parents, Bob and Patty Castleberry, are still living in a hotel after their home was evacuated Saturday along the Yellowstone less than a mile from the site of the ruptured pipeline. She said her mother, who suffers from a respiratory condition, passed out several times even after the couple left the house.

"All their clothes, the suitcase -- everything smelled like solid crude oil; when my mom got away from it, her symptoms disappeared," Anderson said.

She said Exxon is paying her parents' hotel bill as well as covering the cost of feed for the couple's 10 goats that have been steered away from oil-soaked grasslands.

The cause of the rupture was under investigation, but possible damage from erosion caused by unusually heavy river flows following a spring of heavy rains and runoff from record mountain snows are likely to be examined as a factor.



Exxon shut down the pipeline in May after the city of Laurel raised safety concerns due to rising river levels, but the company said it restarted the line after conducting an inspection.

Shares of Exxon Mobil fell slightly on Tuesday on the New York Stock Exchange as investors worried about the bad publicity from the oil spill. Exxon said its Billings, Montana oil refinery cut back production over the weekend as a result of the spill but other refineries in the area were operating normally.

The Montana oil spill is far smaller than the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico last year and the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989. The BP spill spewed 168 million gallons of oil and the Exxon Valdez spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil. By contrast, Exxon estimates the Montana pipeline has leaked only 42,000 gallons of crude into the Yellowstone River.

(Additional reporting by Laura Zuckerman; Writing by [Steve Gorman](#); Editing by [Greg McCune](#))

U.S.

  Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

 Tweet this  Link this  Share this  Digg this  Email  Reprints

Videos you may like:

by Taboola

Sponsored links



Exxon spills in Yellowstone River

Sun, Jul 03 2011



Monaco's Prince Albert marries

Sat, Jul 02 2011



U.S. coming close to making "greatest unforced error in hi...

Fri, Jul 01 2011



ARTICLE

COMMENTS (0)

Mohamed El-Erian

LIVE Q&A LIVE BLOG Q&A WITH MOHAMAM JULY 7TH, 9:00 A

Add your comment

Post to Facebook

We welcome comments that advance the story through relevant opinion, anecdotes, links and data. If you see a comment that you believe is irrelevant or inappropriate, you can flag it to our editors by using the report abuse links. Views expressed in the comments do not represent those of Reuters. For more information on our comment policy, see <http://blogs.reuters.com/fulldisclosure/2010/09/27/toward-a-more-thoughtful-conversation-on-stories/>

Comments (0)

Be the first to comment on reuters.com.

Add yours using the box above.

Social Stream (What's this?)



Whipple VN Jones III

Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms <http://bit.ly/oBTypM>

2 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



smittym

Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms | Reuters <http://reut.rs/nOjwMg>

2 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



Erich

Whats it gonna take. - Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill | Reuters <http://t.co/JRSq6oY> via @reuters

5 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



Kate Ruffing

Ugh! RT @GreenEnergyNews: Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms: HELENA, Montana (Reuters) - <http://t.co/oWmdHK1>

6 Minutes Ago

from Twitter

Kelly Freund

Be yourself
& I promise
People will
Enjoy it,
& if they don't,
Forget them.

RT @Earth_News: Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms <http://bit.ly/n00vP6>
@reuters

8 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



[carbonmeme](#)
Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms <http://reut.rs/rsSOlm>

10 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



[Sam](#)
Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms <http://dlvr.it/Z419j> USA News

12 Minutes Ago

from Twitter



Reuters

LIVE Q&A LIVE BLOG Q&A WITH MOHAMED EL-ERIAN
JULY 7TH, 9:00 A.M. ET



A LIVE Q&A WITH CEO OF PIMCO
MOHAMED EL-ERIAN

LIVE BLOG

[Exxon Yellowstone River oil spill disrupts ranches, farms](#)

HELENA, Montana (Reuters) - Environmental officials scrambled on Tuesday to assess the extent of contamination from a weekend oil spill that has fouled water supplies and ranch lands along a scenic and otherwise pristine stretch of the Yellows...

26 Minutes Ago via Arktan

from Reuters

2 more (expand)

[See all comments »](#)

Join the conversation:    

Ads by Marchex



[Top Stock for 2011 - GTSO](#)
Desperate Search For Rare Earth Minerals Solved. Rare Opportunity.
www.RareEarthExporters.com



[New Wind Tech Launches Low Cost Electric](#)
Mass Megawatts Wind (stock ticker MMMW) launches product to lower electric cost
www.massmegawatts.com



[Compare Credit Card Offers & Apply Now](#)
Top Rated Credit Cards Online. Choose from Multiple Cards. As seen on PBS TV.
www.CardRatings.com



[Top Stock for 2011 - GTSO](#)
Desperate Search For Rare Earth Minerals Solved. Rare Opportunity.
www.RareEarthExporters.com