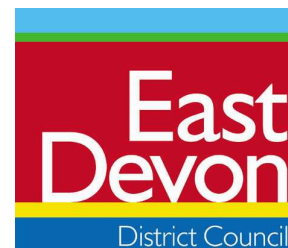




INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



News Service

16 August 2007

CONTRACTORS AND COUNCIL STAFF WORKING HARD TO DELIVER...

Clear beaches and clearer information

WITH the holiday season in full swing and residual oil from the MSC Napoli continuing to wash up on East Devon's beaches, EDDC and salvage contractors DRS Demolition are redoubling their efforts to keep the coastline as clean as possible and to keep the public informed of progress.

While DRS and EDDC staff patrol the beaches to identify and deal with new patches of oil pollution, the flow of information to the public is being upgraded via new web pages and information boards at local beaches. These give detailed information on the latest situation and are maintained by the onshore contractors. There are limitations as to how on-shore patches of oil can be treated.

Any sightings of oil should be reported via telephone to East Devon District Council on **01395 571 700**. The Council will immediately pass the details on to the contractors.

The public are asked to exercise care when reporting oil sightings and do so promptly. Well-intentioned but outdated and inaccurate information has led to delays in identifying and responding to spills on local beaches.

What to do if affected

If anyone is affected by oil on their skin or hair, or if a pet is affected, the oil is best removed by the use of baby or cooking oil, followed by washing with normal soap.

The bow section of the Napoli has been removed to Belfast for recycling and the stern section will now be made safe and removed for recycling.

It is likely that small amounts of oil will continue to come ashore or be released from shingle banks above and below the tide line over the coming months. Whilst every reasonable effort is made to contain oil and to prevent further leakage, this cannot be guaranteed.

The Napoli carried light, medium and heavy fuel oils, a total amount of about 4,000 tons (4,000 cubic meters), and some 2,300 containers.

To date, all but 9 containers have been located and dealt with. The 9 missing containers do not contain any hazardous materials or cargo.

Operations to remove oil from the vessel were conducted and some 3,800 tons of oil was successfully pumped out and secured. The total spillage was about 200 tons (200 cubic meters). To put this in context, the Sea Empress in Milford Haven in 1996 spilled 72,000 tons (72,000 cubic meters) of oil. In Milford Haven, the environment was fully recovered within 18 months.

The responses to all pollution and the recovery of containers, container parts and their contents, oil spills off-shore and on-shore following protocols established between all interested parties. These protocols incorporate the use of booms, absorbents, heavy plant, manual labour and dispersants wherever beneficial.

The ship's owners undertook to manage and pay for the on and off-shore recovery and clear up operations. This has included, from the time of the vessel's arrival, onshore contractors, salvors and off-shore contractors, divers, aerial, surface and shore surveillance, of the Napoli and Lyme Bay. Divers continue to identify and clear container parts and cargo from the sea bed, from the deeper waters in the bay to the tide line.

People on the beach may observe rigid inflatable boats (RIBS), service boats and landing craft operating along the coastline. These vessels are working and so boating enthusiasts are advised to keep well clear. The onshore contractor is using heavy plant, manual labour, an ATV, 4WD vehicles and an inflatable in their efforts to monitor and to react to oil threatening the local beaches.

Contractors not causing pollution

The public are asked to remember that these contractors are not responsible for the pollution; their aim is to reduce environmental damage as much as possible.

On and off-shore oil spills are attended to under internationally agreed protocols. These protocols exclude the use of chemical dispersants on-shore and focus on environmentally accepted methods including the use of inert absorbents and physical waste and oil removal. They also recognise the role and capacity of the natural environment to disperse oil pollution. Use of chemical dispersants is strictly controlled and their use onshore is prohibited.

Officers from East Devon District Council and Devon County Council have been involved since Day 1 of the Napoli incident. They have worked at various stages of the operation with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), the Police, Environment Agency, National Trust and many other agencies to deal with the many and varied challenges that the ship has presented.

Councillor Chris Gibbings, EDDC's Community Safety Champion, said: "We work with other agencies to plan for dealing with all manner of emergencies. But all the planning in the world cannot prepare you for the special challenges of a real incident such as this.

"However well prepared you are, you cannot know in advance what events will happen – and that is all the more true when you are dealing with elements as unpredictable as the weather and the sea.

“Our contingency plans have worked very well in the main, but there have been occasions where we have had to literally formulate our next move on the hoof. With hindsight, we would probably do some things differently. But hindsight is something you don’t have when you are in the thick of things and so everyone has to do their best. I am proud of the way EDDC staff have worked and co-operated with other agencies to deal with this incident.

“We are learning lessons as we go along. When it’s all over, we will review our response and amend our contingency plans accordingly. Meanwhile, we have to roll up our sleeves and get on with it”.

Working together

Councillor Mike Green, EDDC Ward Member for Beer and Branscombe, also had praise for the way the council teams had responded. He said: “We are not out of the woods yet, but we have come this far without any serious impact on the environment and minimal damage to the local economy. People have been working hard and working together to tackle each problem as it arises. It’s a crying shame that a picturesque village like Branscombe on the Jurassic Coast should be affected in this way. But we have to be thankful that we have not had to close beaches. At Beer, we have largely been lucky to escape most of the oil that has come ashore. I’d like to apologise to any visitor to our resorts who has been affected by oil. You have my assurance that we are doing our best to keep the beaches clean and keep the public informed”.

Councillor Margaret Rogers, Devon County Council's Executive Member for Environment and local Member for Seaton and Branscombe, said: "There are still concerns in the community about oil on our beaches, especially at Seaton, and we all look forward to the removal of the ship's stern finally. In the meantime though I am full of admiration for the contractors and the difficult task they have to minimise the impact of oil. The East Devon coastline is still a wonderful place to visit and our villages and towns continue to welcome visitors in their thousands, but we ask people to heed the notices and local information in areas where there is still a risk of oil".

Over the next two weeks, EDDC is inviting the Media to attend Press Calls on two more of East Devon’s beaches, to see the work that is being done and to talk to key people involved in the clean-up operation. There will also be further photo / filming opportunities, as follows:

Week 2 - Thursday 23 August at 10 a.m.

Come to Branscombe Beach (near Sea Shanty) and meet Councillor Mike Green, EDDC Ward Member for Branscombe. Also attending will be a spokesperson for the National Trust, owners of Branscombe Beach.

Week 3 - Thursday 30 August at 10 a.m.

Come to Sidmouth Beach (Port Royal end) and meet Andy Borman, Devon County Council's Emergency Planning Officer.

Ends

For information, please contact:

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www.eastdevon.gov.uk