

DENR estimates oil spill damage at P7B

INITIAL estimates of the environmental damage from the Oriental Mindoro oil spill stand at P7 billion, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said the damage estimates were due to the exposure of coral reefs, seagrasses, mangroves and fisheries to the oil spill.

In a television interview with ANC, Loyzaga said: "The possible exposure area for us is P7 billion."

Loyzaga also said the agency would need to "observe what the physical impacts are," adding: "What we have to do now is verify on the ground how much of these reefs have actually been touched, how many of the mangroves have actually been destroyed and how many of the seagrasses have actually been affected."

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) had earlier recommended that fishing bans in municipalities affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro stay, saying its analysis of food safety for produce caught in the area remained inconclusive.

The agency said fish samples collected and analyzed from select sites in Oriental Mindoro last April 10 showed significant increases in amounts of oil and grease but added they are still within the standard of less than three milligrams per liter of the DENR water classification and use.

BFAR added that low-level polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) were detected in all fish samples from Oriental Mindoro collected on April 3 while PAH accumulation was observed in samples collected from the municipalities of Bongabong and San Teodoro.

PCG CLEAN-UP

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said the shoreline affected by the oil spill caused by the February 28 sinking of the oil tanker MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro is down to around 8.35 kilometers as of last Wednesday.

Citing information from PCG's Incident Management Team, the PCG said 6.57 kilometers of the yet-to-cleared shoreline are situated in Pola town while 1.78 other kilometers are in Naujan town.

The PCG said the team recently conducted a resurvey of 11 affected barangays in Pola (Misong, Tagumpay, Puting Caco, Tiguihan, Bayanan, Zone 1, Zone 2, Batuhan, Calima, Buhay na Tubig, and Bacawan) and two barangays in Naujan (Masaguin and Herrera).

“A total of 27.531 kilometers of shoreline out of 34.109 kilometers total length of shoreline affected in Pola are cleaned while about 5.305 kilometers out of 7.09 kilometers are recorded (cleaned) in Naujan,” the PCG said in a statement issued yesterday. “However, a total length of about 6.578 kilometers of shoreline remains to be contaminated in Pola and 1.785 kilometers in Naujan.”

It said the shoreline cleanup in Pola and Naujan is 80.71 percent and 74.82 percent complete, respectively.

The PCG also reported that the shoreline of Barangays Tiguihan, Zone 1 and 2 are already considered 100 percent clean.

PCG said authorities are “conducting phase 2 and phase 3 shoreline cleanup by conducting flushing, pressure washing on hard surfaces for remaining contaminated areas, pebble/cobble washing, and manual cleaning.”

“Remaining oil are left to weather and degrade naturally,” the PCG said, adding it will “continuously monitor for possible new oil sightings in the said two municipalities.”

The MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro after encountering engine trouble due to overheating. It was transporting more than 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil to Iloilo, from Bataan, at that time.

Authorities completed remotely-operated vehicle operations and bagging operations on the sunken vessel about three weeks ago. The next phase of the operation is hot tapping and siphoning of the remaining oil inside the vessel. – ***With Victor Reyes***