



# T/V PUERTO RICAN Oil Spill



On October 31, 1984, the Tanker Vessel *PUERTO RICAN* exploded and began the release of at least 1.47 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary over a two-week period. The back half of the tanker eventually sunk with 365,500 gallons of bunker fuel that leaked for several years afterward.

## Damages from the Spill

Resource damage from the oil was assessed with beach surveys; water, sediment, and tissue samples; and overflights of the area. It was estimated that 2,874 birds died. Twenty six bird species were observed to be directly affected by the incident, killing 1,856 Common Murres, 548 Cassin's Auklets, and 176 Arctic Loons. The *T/V PUERTO RICAN* incident was during the non-breeding season when Common Murres float on the water's surface making them susceptible to the spill. Exposure to oil could easily affect later breeding success due to physiological impairment.

Fifteen elephant seals were sighted with oil on their fur, probably from when they hauled themselves across oiled shorelines. Of great concern was oil leaking from the stern and its impact on fur seals. Northern fur seals, which are insulated from the cold by their fur, had begun to breed in this region after

Did you know that just one quart of oil can create a 2 acre oil slick (the size of 3 football fields)?

Report oil spills to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) at 1-800-OILS-911, or Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) at 1-888-334-2258. Please report spills **AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE**, since rapid response helps to lessen the damage of spilled oil.



*Oil spilling from the T/V PUERTO RICAN*

more than a hundred-year absence.

The majority of the plankton in the path of the oil were killed. The commercial species definitively affected by the incident were the larvae of the Dungeness Crab, shrimp, krill, and rockfish. It was estimated that 8 million crabs would have survived to adulthood if not for the spill.

The long-term impact of the sunken stern carrying bunker fuel is unknown. During the first few weeks, there were oil slicks at the surface above the stern. The impact of this chronic pollution source is hard to determine.



*Over 1,800 Common Murres were killed during the T/V PUERTO RICAN oil spill*

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## Timeline of T/V *PUERTO RICAN* Oil Spill

Oct 31: Dawn explosion and fire on T/V *PUERTO RICAN*, located 20 km (12 miles) outside the Golden Gate Bridge, just outside of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

Nov 1: Tanker towed southwestward between mainland and the Farallon Islands. Small oil slick released.

Nov 3: Vessel broke up at 1:30 AM, releasing approximately 1,470,000 gallons of oil (lube oil, lube oil additives, and bunker oil). Stern section sunk 17 km south of Farallon Islands at 37° 30.6' N 123° 2' W with 365,500 gallons of bunker fuel. Bow section was still under tow towards the southwest.

Nov 5: Slick spread out. Five oiled birds showed up on Marin County beaches. Winds increased from the southwest with a new storm.

Nov 6: Oil touched Southeast Farallon Island, receded southward, and passed northward by the Island during the night. Some oiled birds were seen on the Island.

Nov 7: Clean Bay vessel, *Mr. CLEAN II*, worked all night at the Farallon Islands. 250-300 oiled birds were sighted, ten were lifted off the Island by Clean Bay helicopter.

Nov 8: Point Reyes Bird Observatory helped Point Reyes National Seashore organize collection of oiled birds on Point Reyes beaches and airlift more birds off Southeast Farallon Island.

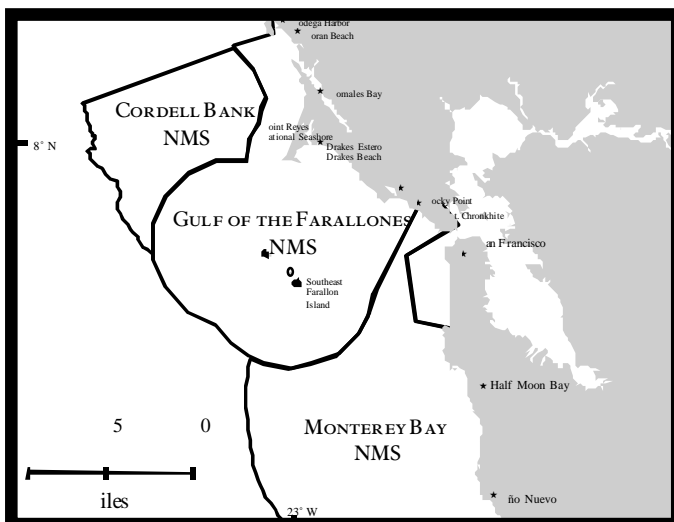
Nov 9: Oil in a sheen extended from the Farallon Islands to the south end of Point Reyes; thicker oil in a patch 15 km long and 100 m wide was offshore. Light oil touched Drake's Beach; a boom was put in place at Drake's Estero. Extensive collection of oiled birds in Marin County.

Nov 10: Oil slick continued north to within 2 km of Bodega Head, touched Doran Beach, and entered Bodega Harbor. Slick extended as far north as the Russian River. Many oiled birds came ashore.

Nov 12: Oil slick, 9 km long and extending 12 km west of Fort Ross, north of Bodega Bay, was broken up and not continuous. Ten oiled birds were found alive in Bodega Bay.

Nov 15: Coast Guard Port Captain for San Francisco authorized the return of the *PUERTO RICAN*'s bow to San Francisco Bay.

Nov 18: Aerial surveillance of pelagic bird and mammal populations continued. Coast Guard continued periodic aerial surveys for oil slicks.



For more information contact:

Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association  
(415) 561-6625 [www.farallones.org](http://www.farallones.org)

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary  
[www.gfnms.nos.noaa.gov](http://www.gfnms.nos.noaa.gov)

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