

MEMORANDUM *W*
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Other

TO: Jim Ehlke

DATE: May 10, 1971

FROM: H. B. Tracy *HBT*

SUBJECT: Oil Spill of April 26, 1971 at
Texaco Refinery Dock, Anacortes, Washington

An oil spill in Puget Sound occurred during the early morning hours of April 26, 1971, at the Texaco oil refinery pier, Anacortes, while United Transportation Company (Puget Sound Tug & Barge), Barge #U17 was receiving 20,000 barrels of #2 diesel oil for delivery to Burlington Northern in Seattle.

According to Mr. Robert Roe, General Manager of Puget Sound Tug and Barge (PST&B), one-half the 40,000 barrel capacity barge was being loaded at Texaco; the remaining one-half was to be filled with Shell products. Simultaneous loading of all tanks consigned to Texaco began late in the evening of April 25. At about 0230, April 26, the Texaco loading attendant shut off the pumps stating that approximately 20,000 barrels had been delivered. The PST&B tankermen questioned the quantity received since the tanks were not topped off. An investigation followed which revealed that the sea cock was left open during the entire loading operation. The sea cock opens below the water line and is used by tankermen to flush out the barge tanks with sea water which is frequently done after off-loading while the barge is under way. According to the Coast Guard, the sea cock valve handle on U17 was open twelve revolutions and lashed in that position.

The Coast Guard was notified of the spill by PST&B almost immediately. The information was forwarded to Bob McCormick, WDE Northwest Regional Manager early that morning. At approximately 0800 the Captain of the Port (COTP) released to the press a statement that 5,000 gallons of #2 diesel oil had been spilled at Anacortes. Bob McCormick called me about 0830 and relayed the information that the Coast Guard had given him. I notified Director Biggs' office and contacted Don Provost for men and equipment. Provost and McCormick arranged for Bob Bishop and John Hodgson to conduct the initial investigation. Bishop left Olympia with the 14-foot Boston Whaler in tow and picked up Hodgson at Redmond. They arrived in Anacortes shortly after noon.

I called Bob Roe of PST&B about 0930. Mr. Roe said he left Seattle around 0400 for Anacortes and was at the Texaco refinery dock about 0700 where he could see very little oil, but the diesel oil odor was strong. He returned to Seattle where he was besieged with calls from the press; therefore he dispatched to the scene two tugs, a shallow draft tug, three open boats, several hundred feet of boom, the Pac-lar skimmer, sorbents and 25 to 30 men. He said the men and equipment were enroute. He was not sure as yet how much oil was lost.

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During the afternoon, radio announcers persisted in making sensational reports concerning the spill and continued to report the quantity at 5,000 gallons. McCormick called at approximately 2000 Monday evening and said that he thought the spill was more serious than first indications. Aerial shots shown on television that evening indicated to me that the quantity was much more than 5,000 gallons. I told McCormick that I would drive to Anacortes early the next morning. Jerry Bollen called later in the evening and asked me to go to Anacortes and coordinate operations regarding the oil spill. I mentioned that I had already talked to Bob McCormick and was committed to driving to the scene the next morning. Bollen felt the situation warranted a flight to Anacortes; therefore we agreed that I would take off as early as possible, fly over the spill area and plot the oil slick. After the flight I would meet with the Puget Sound Tug and Barge and Texaco representatives.

I was unable to contact Kenmore Air Service that evening; however, I did get them shortly after 0800 Tuesday, April 27, and scheduled a pick up at Capitol Lake for 0900. The one-hour delay provided time to dispatch more men and equipment to the scene.

Bishop and Hodgson stayed at Redmond Monday night and returned to Anacortes early Tuesday. Ron Devitt and Gary Rothwell were sent to the scene with the 20-foot Fiberform and McCormick deployed John Arquist and Stew Messman from the Redmond office. We agreed to meet at the Skyline Boat Harbor at 1200 which would provide ample time for me to survey the area from the air. The flight would provide the information upon which we would base our actions.

Bill Peters of Kenmore Air Service picked me up at Capitol Lake shortly after 0900 on 27 April. Our first oil slick sightings were near Smith Island. Heavy concentrations were noted in the channel over McArthur Bank west of Smith Island and south of Lopez Island. Oil slicks were noted west of Allen Island and along the north shore of Burrows Island. A large slick was noted in Rosario Strait at the confluence of Bellingham and Guemes Channels. Shoreline contamination was noted along the south and west side of Cypress Island and along the south, north and east side of Guemes Island. Heavy concentrations were noted in the bays of Decatur Island and the southern end of Lopez Island. No oil was observed in Padilla Bay where large flocks of black brandt were seen. The heaviest oil concentrations were noted off Smith Island, in Rosario Strait and along the south shore of Guemes Island. Clean-up crews were observed on Guemes Island and bird collectors were active on the beaches.

We landed at Skyline Boat Harbor around 1100. I called Clar Pratt and reported my observations. I also called McCormick who informed me that a correction had been released in the quantity of oil spilled changing the figure from 5,000 gallons to 5,000 barrels.

The MDE field crew met at Skyline Boat Harbor at noon. We divided into four sections. Each group was issued a walkie-talkie trans-receiver with the agreement that we report in on the hour. Messman and Arquist, traveling by car, monitored the beach clean-up on Guemes Island and conducted a medical clinic on North Beach. Bishop and Rothwell, in the Fiberform, inspected the west shore of Guemes Island and Fidalon Island. Boston Whaler performed a similar function on the south and east shore of Guemes Island and in Padilla Bay. Bill Peters and I flew out to Smith Island where we found a small

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walked out about two miles of beach where most of the birds on the island seemed to be concentrated. I observed large flocks of seaulls and black brandt and numerous birds of other species including diving ducks and shore birds. All birds on the island seemed to be healthy. On the return trip to Skyline Boat Harbor we skirted Lopez, Cypress and Guemes Islands again and noted the principle oil slick concentrations remained south of Lopez Island, in Rosario Strait, in Guemes Channel and along the south shore of Guemes Island.

At 1400 I met with the Coast Guard On-Scene-Commander and industry officials at the Texaco refinery. Captain McCormack, USCG, and representatives of Puget Sound Tug and Barge, Pac Mar Services, EPA, Texaco and Foss Launch and Tug Company were present. I reported my observations of the oil slick locations which agreed with those of the Coast Guard. Mr. Roe reported that Puget Sound Tug and Barge had five tug boats, three open boats, a mop cat skimmer, six hundred feet of plastic boom, 500 bags of sorbant material, six vehicles, hand tools and thirty men on the scene, tug crews not included. The combined manpower resources of Texaco, Pac Mar, Foss and Puget Sound Tug and Barge were available if needed. Roe said the clean-up crews would continue to work the south beach of Guemes Island and that additional crews would be assigned, if necessary, to the south beach of Lopez Island early Wednesday morning. Roe ordered two fire-monitor-equipped tugs to work the area south of Lopez Island Tuesday night. An effort would be made to break up the large oil slick in that sector using high pressure streams of water.

Mr. Byrd, Regional Deputy Director under Mr. Agee informed me that Mr. Van Cleave, Spill Chief for EPA was due in from Washington, D.C. and that Mr. Jim Willmann, EPA, was on his way up from Portland, Oregon. The EPA fielded eight people during the Anacortes incident including one public relations man, two biologists, two lawyers, Byrd, Van Cleave and Jim Willmann.

I returned to the Skyline Boat Harbor where the WDE field group met to evaluate the days information and formulate activities for Wednesday. Everyone agreed that the principle area requiring clean up was the south beach of Guemes Island. A small cove on the southeast tip of the island also was heavily contaminated. We decided that I would make an early morning surveillance flight on the trip up which would provide current information on oil slick locations. Three WDE personnel remained in Anacortes that night while the other four returned to their respective homes. I made arrangements with Bill Peters of Kenmore Air Service for a 0700 pick-up at Capitol Lake the following morning.

Peters arrived shortly after 0700 on Wednesday, 28 April. When we arrived at Smith Island no oil slicks were visible. We covered a broad section of water from Whidbey Island to San Juan Island; however, no oil slicks were observed. We inspected the bays on the south end of Lopez Island, and skirted the shoreline around Cypress and Guemes Islands. Padilla Bay and the beaches of Fidalgo Island and Decatur Island also were examined closely. With the exception of slight traces of oil at a relatively few locations, the only oil observed in significant quantities was confined to the south beach of Guemes Island. The oil slick had degraded leaving only the south shore of Guemes Island requiring clean-up.

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I landed at Skyline Boat Harbor and telephoned Clar Pratt at Olympia and Bob McCormick at Redmond. I told McCormick we would not need Hodgson, Messman or Arnquist on the scene and sent Gary Rothwell back to Olympia with the Boston Whaler. This left Ron Devitt, Bob Bishop and I at Anacortes. At Director Biggs' request I made a one-hour helicopter flight with Reed Brown, WDG, around Padilla Bay, Guemes Island and Cypress Island observing waterfowl damage. During the flight, Brown and I counted about 200 birds that appeared to be distressed. Most were grebes, coots, scoter, merganzers and scaup.

I had the chopper land at the Skyline Boat Harbor where Bishop and Devitt were waiting. We took the ferry to Guemes Island and walked out about one mile of the south beach. This area was the hardest hit by the oil. The base lines of big boulders were strewn with dead and dying animals such as snails, chitons, limpets and crabs. Clams were laying on the beach with valves agape. Live clams also were noted and under rocks some shore crabs seemed essentially unaffected. Two or three blennies were observed that were alive and both live and dead starfish were seen. We took pictures of the beach and collected samples of clams for analysis.

We checked the progress of the beach clean-up along the south beach and in the small cove on the southeast tip of the island. Most of the heavy oil had been picked up with Fiberpearl; however thin slicks persisted as oil leached out from the beach gravel on incoming tide. Crews were lining the beach with gunny sacks filled with Fiberpearl to absorb it. For two or three hours Wednesday afternoon, fifty U. S. Navy volunteers from Whidbey Island assisted in this operation. Beach clean-up was also in progress at the west end of the south beach.

We drove to North Beach on Guemes Island to visit the animal care station which was set up in the Mitchell home. About 20 volunteers had processed some 300 birds. One hundred fifty were either collected dead or had died at the station, 130 had been cleaned and flown to the clinic in Seattle and 20 more were awaiting shipment. Of the 130 shipped to Seattle, 105 had died. Total birds processed by the volunteers throughout the emergency amounted to 360. Mortalities of birds cleaned by the volunteers amounted to about 80 - 85 percent through Thursday, 29 April.

I returned to the Skyline Boat Harbor where I called the Texaco office to learn that the COTP with staff had left for Seattle. Apparently, it was their intention to close the case.

I flew back to Olympia that evening and had Bishop and Devitt return with the Fiberform. Ron Lee was to be in the area on Thursday; therefore, I planned on spending Thursday catching up on reports regarding the spill.

About 1000, 29 April, Captain McCormack called complaining that Jim Willmann had just called him demanding the OSC return to Anacortes. McCormack said that Willmann had refused to agree to close the case and he indicated that Willmann had been making some unreasonable demands on PST&B regarding clean-up. I left for Anacortes at noon prepared for an overnight stay. I met Willmann, Lt. Stone, and Mr. Roe at the Texaco office and the four of us travelled to Guemes Island together. Clean-up was still in progress in the cove on the south east tip of the island. The odor of diesel oil was still quite noticeable, however, the slick was a very thin film that leached out of the beach gravel. We agreed to make one more observation hop of the immediate area on Friday morning. If no slicks requiring clean-up were noted on that flight we would close the case at noon Friday, April 30.

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A Coast Guard helicopter picked up Jim Willmann, Van Cleave, Lt. Stone and I at the Anacortes airport. We covered the entire area from Smith Island north to Sinclair Island and from Padilla Bay west to Haro Strait. Only faint traces of oil were seen. These were thin slicks which were located primarily off the south shore of Guemes Island. We landed at Texaco where a meeting was held with representatives of WDE, EPA, PST&B and Texaco. It was agreed that the clean-up phase of the oil spill incident would be terminated as of 1200, 30 April 1971. Mr. Roe noted that they would continue their efforts in breaking up the film along the south beach of Guemes Island through Friday, April 30. I pointed out that only the clean-up phase of the incident was closed; the damage and penalty assessment phases remained open.

On Friday afternoon we conducted spot observations at D'Arvy Island and Discovery Island west of San Juan Island in Canada. We also examined about two miles of beach at two locations on San Juan Island and two locations on the south shore of Lopez Island. No mortalities or other damage was observed that could be attributed to the diesel oil spill that occurred at Anacortes.

In a final analysis of our response to the Anacortes oil spill, our initial reaction was somewhat suppressed due to the Coast Guard's report of 5,000 gallons instead of 5,000 barrels. We also were remiss in verifying the quantity lost; however, in the past we have not approached industry with suspicion. We had seven men on the scene throughout the critical period and one or more men were present until the case was closed on Friday, April 30. According to our contingency plan, this was a minor spill not requiring a massive clean-up effort and therefore not requiring mobilization of our Oil Spill Action Plan.

HBT:ml