



MEDIA RELEASE

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Lack of Effective Canadian Legislation Leaves B.C. Oiled Wildlife in Crisis

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA) fears that thousands of impacted wildlife will die in the event of a major oil spill in B.C. Last week's 1000-litre oil spill in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet has left 52 rescued wild birds languishing in a temporary treatment facility for over a week, and more waiting to be rescued, because a Hong Kong based company does not want to pay the full costs of rehabilitating the birds. The animals are ill, but healthy enough to survive the rehabilitation process if rescuers get the green light to begin treatment.

Thus far, the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) has remained silent about whether the government will force the company to pay for rehabilitating impacted wildlife. As the birds' lives hang in the balance, Janice Dickie, WRA's Executive Director, has stated that the lack of effective Canadian legislation for oiled wildlife has enabled polluters like this Hong Kong based company to leave wildlife suffering while they decide if, and how much, they will help pay for rescue efforts.

With no Canadian legislation in place to force companies to pay the costs of wildlife rehabilitation, Dickie wonders what will happen to wildlife in the event of a major spill in B.C. waters. She states, "I have no doubt that other shipping companies around the world are watching this case to see what, if any, protective measures for wildlife will be enforced by the Canadian government. The lack of effective legislation means that it is left to polluters to determine whether British Columbia wildlife are dispensable."

Ten days after the Vancouver oil spill, the Hong Kong based company continues to wrangle with its contractor, Focus Wildlife Ltd., over the costs of the full rehabilitation effort. On Tuesday, the company pulled wildlife rescue crews from the water for over an hour due to the budget dispute, but the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) overruled the order and instructed the crews to return to the water. Today, WRA was shocked to learn that wildlife search and collection efforts have again been halted as the company continues to reject the costs.

Over the last ten days, WRA has been assisting Focus Wildlife in the response effort for wildlife. Focus Wildlife is an internationally respected company that offers oiled wildlife emergency response services around the world, mostly recently saving hundreds of wildlife while working with CN during Alberta's Lake Wabamun spill.

In the United States and European countries that have stronger legislation in place for oil spill response, wildlife rehabilitation costs have been standardized. However, Dickie says that Canadians rely on corporate goodwill, as in the case of Lake Wabamun, where CN paid the full costs of the wildlife response effort without hesitation.

As the Hong Kong-based company continues to stall the rescue and rehabilitation process, WRA is losing hope that the oil-soaked birds currently in care will be saved. The birds are housed in a temporary stabilization unit inside Burrard Clean Operation's facility at the Shellburn Distribution Terminal in Burnaby, B.C. The mobile unit is housed in an inadequate, unventilated tractor trailer located in the parking lot, which has left rehabilitators unable to begin the washing and treatment process.

The slick was centred in the Second Narrows Bridge area, where hundreds of cormorants are currently nesting. Also in the area are Canada Geese, Mallard ducks, Belted Kingfishers and Glaucous-winged Gulls. Other species observed in the area are Northwestern Crows, Barn Swallows and Harbour Seals.

Dozens of minor spills in both the terrestrial and marine environments impact wildlife in the Lower Mainland each year. WRA's wildlife rehabilitation centre admits an annual average of 3,200 injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wild animals.

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC is a not-for-profit wildlife rehabilitation society located next to Burnaby Lake at 5216 Glencarin Drive.