



MEDIA RELEASE

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Six days after the Westwood Annette spilled 29,000 litres of fuel into Howe Sound near Squamish, the insurer of the ship has finally contracted with Focus Wildlife to launch an oiled wildlife response effort.

Focus Wildlife was mobilized in the late hours of Tuesday evening, a request that came after this week's hard-hitting media reports that questioned the federal and provincial government's lack of response for the imperiled wildlife.

Janice Dickie, WRA's Executive Director, states, "I am relieved to learn that BC's only expert oiled wildlife response company has been mobilized to launch a rescue effort." However, Dickie cautions that Focus Wildlife faces a difficult rehabilitation effort given that the birds have now been oiled for over six days, and many are extremely ill at this stage.

Dickie anticipates that less wildlife will make it through the rehabilitation process due to the long delay before rescue and receipt of treatment. However, she predicts that a number of the moderately oiled wildlife can still be rehabilitated despite the delay. She says, "Focus Wildlife will have trained search and collection crews on the water within 24 hours, and will capture many of the oiled birds over the next few days."

Thus far, both the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and the BC Environment Ministry have remained tight lipped about whether the government will require the ship owner to pay the full cost of oiled wildlife response, or whether the government will fund a portion of the effort.

The lack of effective Canadian legislation to force companies to pay the costs of wildlife rehabilitation has enabled polluters to leave wildlife suffering while government decides if a rescue effort should be mounted.

Dickie states, "After an oil spill in the United States, the government hands the polluter a rescue and recovery plan for oiled wildlife, and the polluter must follow the plan. In Canada, the government asks the polluter to devise its own plan for wildlife, and the government then decides whether to accept the plan. This process often leads to either no response for wildlife or a delayed response, as seen in the Squamish spill.

Over the last 6 days, the Wildlife Rescue Association (WRA) has received dozens of reports from concerned members of the public who have reported oiled wildlife or are finding dead oiled wildlife washed up on the shores as far away from the spill as North Vancouver and Indian arm.

The Canadian Wildlife Service and BC's Environment Ministry are still requesting that the public call the government emergency line at 604-815-5077 to report sightings of oiled or dead wildlife but, strangely, some callers are then being referred back to WRA's public inquiry line.

Yesterday, the Oiled Wildlife Society of BC and the Wildlife Rehabilitators Network of BC issued a joint statement to both federal and provincial government outlining expectations for future oiled wildlife response in the province. The groups are calling on the government to recognize oiled wildlife response as a distinct profession that operates according to strict protocols and standards of care.

The OWSBC and WRNBC have stated that they are not in favour of regulatory agencies and the Responsible Party looking to not-for-profit wildlife groups or other non-oil spill professionals to take responsibility for oil contaminated wildlife.

Facts about Oil Spills and Impacts on Wildlife

- Millions of water birds die every year due to oil from a plethora of sources, from jet skis and motorboats, to oil washed off streets and into storm drains after rain and major marine spills.
- When an oil spill occurs, birds and marine mammals are often injured or killed by oil that pollutes their habitat. Without human intervention, many distressed birds and animals have no chance of survival.
- If oil is spilled into a marine environment, the first step to stop the crisis is to control the release and spread of oil at its source. This prevents any additional oil exposure to wildlife and coastal areas. At the same time, efforts are made to keep animals away from possible contamination.
- Hazing devices are often used to scare animals, particularly birds, away from oily areas.
- For areas that have been polluted by oil, rescuers must capture affected birds as quickly as possible in order to save them. Once birds have been captured, they are taken immediately to treatment centers where they are given medical treatment and cleaned.

- If treatment centers are not available nearby, temporary facilities must be built in local warehouses or other large buildings that offer electricity, hot water, and ventilation.
- Minimizing stress is critical for ensuring that captured birds survive. Rescue parties usually will contact rehabilitation workers even before they arrive, to make sure that they are prepared to care for the captured birds immediately. This ensures that the birds are treated as quickly as possible.
- The birds that are brought to rescue centers are often frightened, cold, emaciated, dehydrated, exhausted and suffering from the internal effects of oil. Initial procedures may involve cleaning the eyes, nasal and oral passages of oil and dirt, applying saline eye solution, giving oral fluids and activated charcoal solution, but not washing.
- To wash a bird that is already highly stressed and not medically stable could mean death. Many oiled bird's die because well-meaning people, anxious to get oil off the bird, wash it immediately, resulting in death from stress. It is actually more important to give oiled birds the much needed nutrition, hydration and medical treatment they need before they are washed.
- Once stable, oiled birds go through a series of tub washes alternating between baths with a one percent solution of Dawn dishwashing liquid and clean water. The wash time varies depending on the amount of oil, and the size of the bird, but on average it takes two people 45 minutes and 300 gallons of water to do a thorough washing.
- After being washed, the birds are put in net bottom cages with warm air dryers. The final steps are to put them in warm water pools, where they continue to preen, and finally into cold pools. Birds in rehabilitation are checked constantly to make sure that they are completely waterproofed and when their blood work and weight are in the normal range, they are banded and released.

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