July 6 Update on Federal Response to Oil Spill near Billings, Montana (MT)

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At approximately 11:00 PM on Friday, July 1 a break occurred in a 12-inch pipeline owned by ExxonMobil that resulted in a spill of crude oil into the Yellowstone River approximately 20 miles upstream of Billings, Montana. According to the company's estimates, 1,000 barrels of oil entered the river, which is in flood stage, before the pipeline was cut off.

EPA's primary concern is protection of human health and the environment, and the agency is conducting both air and water sampling to determine what impacts the spill may have on air or water quality, while also ensuring the responsible party is held accountable. EPA has initiated air and water quality sampling and will make the results available to the public as soon as the data are available. Air monitoring using real-time instruments that look for volatile organic compounds and hydrogen sulfide is ongoing with no detections in the last 72 hours. Additionally, air sampling for benzene has been conducted between Laurel, MT, and Billings, MT, with no detectable levels. We are deploying additional air samplers at specific locations to ensure the continued protection of the community and emergency responders.

EPA is also directing and overseeing cleanup activities since arriving at the site. As of Wednesday, July 6, approximately 440 responders are on the scene and conducting cleanup activities. Personnel continue to walk the shores and deploy absorbent boom along the river banks to absorb oil that has collected in slow water areas along the shoreline. Responders continue to work to assess where the oil has traveled and what impact it may be having.

The river has been divided into 4 divisions for planning and operational purposes. Initial cleanup activities are concentrated in the first two divisions -- from Laurel to Duck Creek Bridge and Duck Creek Bridge to Johnson Lane -- where responders have identified the most oil-impacted areas. The third river segment encompasses the area from Johnson Lane to Miles City and will also undergo reconnaissance and cleanup. The fourth division includes the remaining downstream portion of the river from Miles City to Glendive.

Today, EPA issued an order to ExxonMobil, pursuant to the Clean Water Act, directing the company to take a number of clean-up and restoration activities as a result of an oil spill into the Yellowstone River. EPA will continue in its role in directing and overseeing the cleanup and restoration of the river and ensuring the protection of human health and the environment.

EPA is coordinating its response actions with the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and state and local agencies and will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure ExxonMobil, as the responsible party, addresses any and all potential impacts of this spill.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration is responsible for determining the cause of the pipeline failure and has been onsite since Saturday.

Press inquiries: press@epa.gov [1]

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