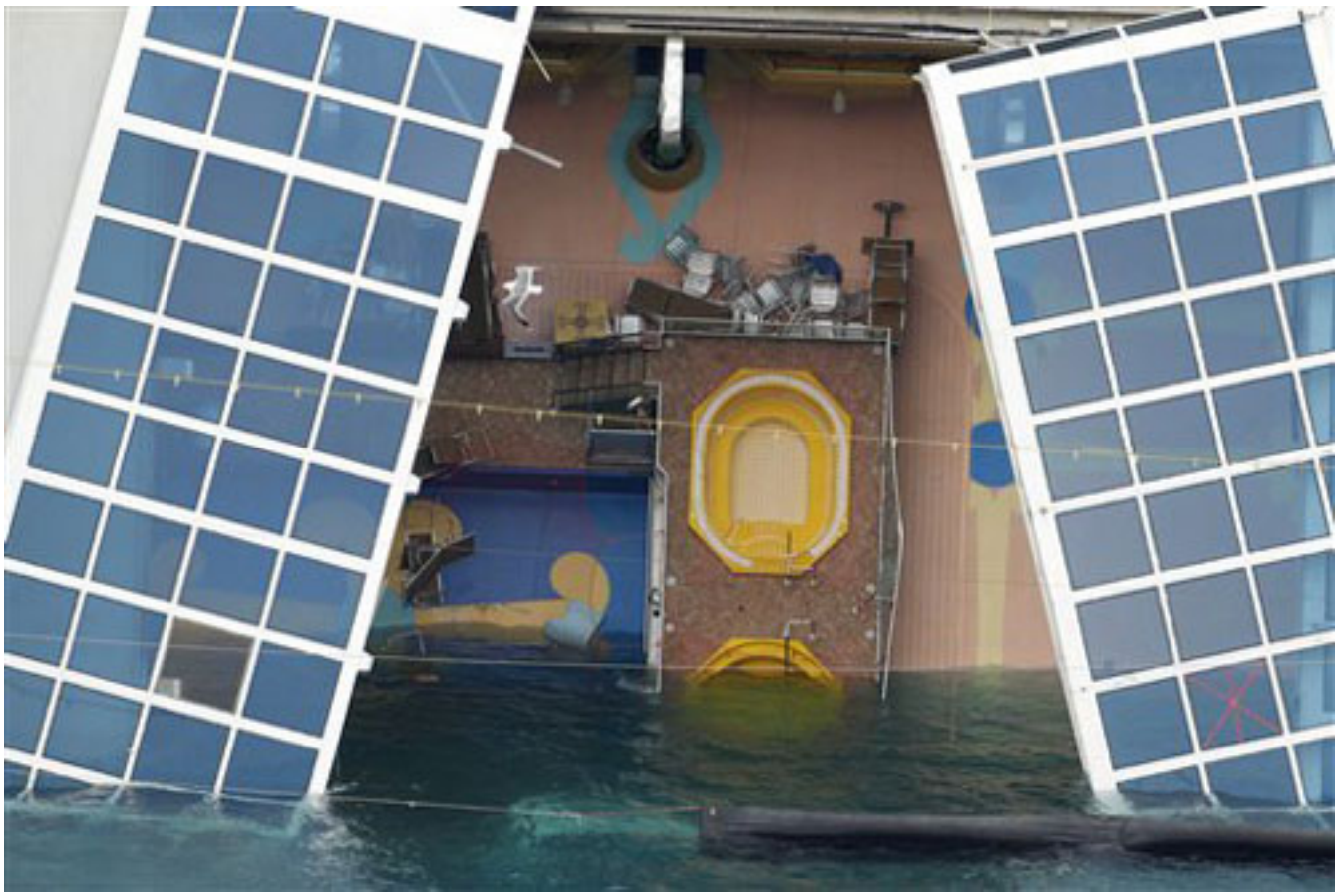
Oil Spreads from Wreck of Ship off Italy

FULVIO PAOLOCCI & VANESSA GERA, Associated Press

GIGLIO, Italy (AP) — A thin film of oil spread from the Costa Concordia cruise ship as waves battered the wreckage off Italy's coast Wednesday, adding to fears of an environmental disaster in the area's sensitive, pristine waters. Authorities were trying to assess how serious and extensive the spread was but said that so far it didn't appear alarming.

Italian authorities also identified a German woman, Siglinde Stumpf, as being among those killed in the Jan. 13 capsizing of the vessel. Stumpf is the 17th person whose body has been identified. Fifteen others are listed as missing.



The search for the missing has been hampered by rough seas, with emergency officials ending the search in the submerged part of the ship due to the danger to rescue workers.

A large crack also appeared Wednesday between two large glass panels that formed part of the roof of the massive ship. The film was spreading from a separate part of the ship, apparently the stern.

The ship contains about 500,000 gallons (2,400 tons) of heavy fuel and other pollutants, and fears have grown that those chemicals could damage an environment that is home to dolphins, whales and other marine life.

Authorities are hoping to pump fuel from the ship, but due to bad weather the effort was being suspended again Wednesday. Floating barriers placed around the ship to protect the water were lifted by winds, allowing the oily film from the ship to spread throughout the bay.

The Italian Port Authority said the leak consisted of a thin sheen of hydrocarbons. However, Civil Protection, the agency overseeing the rescue effort, said that for now there doesn't appear to be reason for alarm, noting that over a week ago there was also a leak of a small amount of diesel and lubricants that turned out not to be serious.

The Concordia ran aground off the Tuscan island of Giglio when the captain deviated from his planned route and struck a reef, creating a huge gash that capsized the ship. Some 4,200 passengers and crew were on board when it capsized.

The liner continued to shift on its rocky perch, moving 7.5 centimeters (3 inches) in seven hours, Civil Protection said, adding to concerns about the stability of the ship's resting place.

The agency noted that sensors had measured "acceleration of the movement of the bow of the ship," but that the movements later slowed to 2 millimeters (0.08 inches) an hour. It said periods of faster shifting had occurred previously due to tides and weather conditions.

The Concordia's movements are being monitored closely by scientists. There are fears that movement could damage the tanks holding the fuel.

Only once the fuel is pumped out — a month-long process — can salvage work begin on removing the ship, either floating it in one piece or cutting it up and towing it away. Removing the 950-foot-long (290-meter) ship could take a full seven to 10 months once a contract is awarded.

Gera reported from Rome.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/18/2014 - 9:28pm*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2012/02/oil-spreads-wreck-ship-italy