Diesel Fuel Spill of 21,000 Gallons Leaves Chevron with Violation Notice

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — State regulators have slapped Chevron with a violation notice over a March fuel spill near a northern Utah bird refuge.

The Utah Division of Water Quality is asking Chevron to provide a report on cleanup operations and a response plan for the pipeline rupture that leaked about 21,000 gallons of diesel fuel.

The split in the pipeline running between Salt Lake City and Spokane, Wash., spilled diesel at Willard Bay State Park and near the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge.

Division Director Walt Baker said his agency is working with the Attorney General's Office to ensure Chevron is held accountable for the spill and its impacts.

"This release has had a significant effect on a fragile ecosystem," he said. "The popular bird-watching and recreational area has been closed because of this spill."

State law gives the company 30 days to respond to the violation notice and 60 days to address the compliance requirements. Water quality officials then would determine any state fines.

"We are committed to cooperating with the Utah Division of Water Quality and responding to the notice in the required time frame," Chevron spokesman Gareth Johnstone said in an email.

Federal regulators, who fined Chevron nearly $500,000 for two Utah spills in 2010, haven't determined penalties for the company's latest petroleum leak.

The 8-inch-diameter pipeline failed March 18, spilling fuel in the marshes. State officials credit a beaver dam for holding back much of the fuel, although it left a family of beavers with petroleum burns. The beavers are being nursed back to health at a wildlife rehabilitation center.

The spill also has been blamed for the deaths of a pair of wood ducks as well as some frogs and minnow-like fish, The Salt Lake Tribune reported. Migratory birds have been scared away from the area by the presence of more than 100 cleanup workers.

State officials said some of the spilled fuel is seeping into groundwater and making its way beyond containment booms at Willard Bay State Park. They have said a cleanup could take months instead of weeks as originally thought, leaving the park indefinitely closed.

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