



Press office 28/8/07

Update on the Oil Spill Crisis in Lebanon

The Ministry of Environment is continuing the management of the oil spill crisis on the national and international fronts under the guidance of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, specifically through building communication channels with both communities (national and international) and mobilizing the necessary resources for the different stages.

The Ministry of Environment continues to complete the cycle of Phase I works of cleanup operations through transporting some of oil spill wastes generated by cleanup operations thus far – and which a small portion of them is still onsite on some sites – to the oil refineries in Tripoli and Zahrani for temporary storage. Some of this waste has already been moved by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and preparations are in place for the second batch of waste transportation.

The Ministry of Environment has, with funding from UNDP, carried out an underwater survey to check the status of the intertidal zone all along the coast from Jadra until Abdeh (Akkar) (with deference to security issues). This survey checked the presence or lack thereof of submerged fuel. The divers went up to a maximum of 20 meters depth and the preliminary results are as follows:

There is no trace of fuel in the water column, however, there is some submerged fuel near some stretches of beach in the following sites:

- A semi-enclosed site in the South (site off Jieh); this can be explained by the nature of the site and its design which prevented the free movement of water currents thereby allowing the fuel to settle on the sand and eventually become submerged
- Off a sandy beach facing high rocks In the North (off Byblos), where the high rocks cause circular water currents in that area and that caused the fuel to mix with the sand and lead to the presence of submerged fuel

To date, Phase II cleanup operations will be implemented in partnership between MoE and the following partners:

- USAID will be carrying out phase II cleanup works on specified sites from Byblos to Anfeh – after the approval of the Council of Ministers on the Memorandum of Understanding between MoE and USAID. USAID is in the process of tendering the work and will initiate Phase II in mid-September.
- Ministry of Culture – Directorate General of Antiquities and UNESCO will be working on sites in Byblos that are on the World Heritage List
- With funding from the Government of Japan, UNDP, through its head office in New York, has tendered for and awarded some sites in Beirut

and South of Beirut to the Greek company EPE that will start Phase II works on the 1st of September 2007.

- The Government of Spain through Phase II works on Palm Island Protected Area in coordination with Palm Island Committee (pending completion of plans and MoU)
- The Government of Norway, through Phase II works on sites North of Beirut (pending completion of plans and MoU)

Message to our citizens in this touristic season

The Ministry of Environment wishes to remind everyone that quality of the Sea water off Lebanon has reverted to what it was before the Oil Spill Crisis of July/August 2006.

The Ministry of Environment again clarifies the following:

- There is no liquid fuel in the water – all the spilled liquid fuel from the attacks on Jieh power plant have been removed from the water
- The remaining fuel on the coast of Lebanon can be found on rocks or in tar balls and it is tar like and does not constitute an additional threat of re-polluting new sites. These polluted sites have been included in Phase II cleanup operations.
- The MoE to date has not received any calls from beachgoers about any new polluted sites, and MoE repeats its advice to all citizens to stay away from polluted sites that still have fuel on them whether they are sandy, rocky or pebbly until these sites have been cleaned as part of Phase II.
- It is important to note that on some beaches, the colour of the sand is “black” and that this does not mean that the beach is polluted with Heavy Fuel Oil. However, should this “black” sand be seen, please notify MoE of the site so that a team from MoE visits and assesses the site.
- Should the fuel get in contact with your skin, MoE again advises citizens to remove the residues of this fuel from the skin by using organic oils such as vegetable oils and olive oils and not organic solvents such as Benzene, Kerozene, Thinners or others.
- Any intervention on the Lebanese coast requires permission from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport – the Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport and the Ministry of Environment.

For more information, please the Ministry of Environment website on www.moe.gov.lb or contact the Service of Guidance and Awareness, Ms. Ghada Salim Mitri, on the following contact details:

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