PERU: ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY AFTER THE SPILL

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European Union

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PERU OIL SPILL AT A GLANCE

11.9K BARRELS OF OIL SPILLED OFF CENTRAL PERUVIAN COASTS **1.4K** HECTARES OF SEA, COAST AND NATURAL RESERVE AFFECTED

An oil spill at a refinery north of Lima on 15 January 2022 caused at least **2,100 tons of oil** to flow into the sea and drift northwards, affecting a marine zone 80 km long that

Oil Spill Triggers Request For Assistance

includes protected areas home to marine life only found in the waters of Peru.

3K FAMILIES AFFECTED BY OIL SPILL'S SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

Source: Government of Peru

Soon after the spill, oil that had been carried north by the flow of the Humboldt current immediately began affecting nearby waters and shorelines in Ventanilla, as well as the neighbouring districts of Ancón, Aucallama, Chancay and Santa Rosa.

Between the size of the spill and the vulnerability of the affected areas, the Government declared a 90-day environmental emergency and formally requested assistance from the United Nations in dealing with the various impacts brought about by the spill, considered one of the worst ecological disasters in Peru's recent history.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), through their Joint Environment Unit (JEU), deployed a team of response and technical experts, including experts from UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM) to Peru to assist the Government's response.

The JEU team sought to advise the Government through technical assistance on containment and clean-up, on managing and coordinating response to the spill's environmental and socioeconomic impacts and on reducing the risk of future oil spill disasters. The team arrived in Lima on 22 January and began working with the UN System in Peru, which includes OCHA's Humanitarian Advisory Team (HAT) within the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), to engage with national and sub-national Government offices and support coordination among more than 30 State institutions. The team also met with technical staff from Repsol, the refinery's operating company.

The deployment's experts in oil spill incident management and rapid environmental assessments conducted reconnaissance visits with technical counterparts from public institutions to begin learning about the spill's impact. The technical experts carried out analyses on the spill's distribution, on the vulnerabilities of nearby natural resources, on the social and human impacts of the disaster and on clean-up and containment methodologies and implementation.

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Cover photos:

1: CEDRE/Fanny Chever 2-4: OCHA/Marc Belanger

From the Front Lines: Supporting the Response

The sun-drenched coastal terrain, high winds and rolling waves that make the central Peruvian coasts a haven for tourists made the spill's clean-up and emergency management a gruelling ordeal for affected people and response teams alike.

The severity of the situation and an outpouring civil society activism led to authorities, refinery personnel and people from affected communities to take to the beaches and begin cleaning up the rush of oil washing ashore the 80 km of affected coastline near Callao, Peru's main seaport. Those participating in the massive clean-up drives worked in sweltering heat and under the harsh summer sun, often with little or no infrastructure that could provide some measure of relief from the backbreaking task at hand. Repsol deployed staff and machinery to affected areas. The Government supported municipal authorities by activating teams from the Ministry of the Environment, the Agency for Environmental Assessment and Enforcement (OEFA), the Ministry of Health's General Directorate for Environmental Health (DIGESA), the National State-Protected Natural Area Service (SERNANP), the Energy and Mining Oversight Agency (OSINERGMIN), the National Civil Defence Institute (INDECI), the Peruvian Armed Forces and the General Directorate for Captaincies and Coastguards (DICAPI), among many others.

The organizations working under the Government's emergency declaration nevertheless began to require specific support to strengthen linkages between their efforts and bolster the overall response. Through continued engagement with Government institutions, municipal authorities and Repsol representatives, the team's technical specialists and coordination experts identified short-, medium- and long-term priorities for supporting oil spill incident management, rapid environmental assessments and evaluations, response coordination and information management.

Photos: OCHA/Marc Belanger



















The team carried out site visits, air and sea reconnaissance outings and technical meetings with various stakeholders to gain a first-hand understanding of the spill's characteristics and response challenges.

These activities allowed the team to perform rapid environmental assessments and profile the oil's properties, the effects of the surrounding weather and marine conditions on the oil, the sensitivity of the surrounding ecosystems, species and habitats, the spill's effects on socioeconomic conditions and the clean-up methods being used.

Through these findings, the team was able to advise and deliver recommendations to authorities on how to strengthen the response, in line with best international practices.



The team met with representatives from the Government and from Repsol to learn about incident management, resource allocation, incident command structures, contingency plans and information flows to identify potential areas for strengthening. Preliminary examinations of collected samples provided information on the oil's density, which can determine whether it will remain on the water's surface or sink, as well as information on properties such as viscosity and emulsification, among others.



Team visits with SERNANP to the affected natural reserves encountered several birds still covered in oil days after the spill, rendering them unable to repel water or conserve heat and leaving them covered in a poisonous substance.

This visible short-term impact on these vibrant ecosystems is only a glimpse into the potential effects on mortality and biodiversity in coming months and years. These impacts may even have consequences for human health, as subsistence fishing often targets edible species that might be exposed to the oil's harmful long-term

effects.

Photo: ISPRA/Luigi Alcaro





With long-term considerations such as these, implementing an environmental monitoring plan will help to understand the full extent of the contamination, assess socioeconomic impact and recovery times and help determine the effectiveness of clean-up operations.

Photo: CEDRE/Emmanuelle Poupon

Photo: Norwegian Coastal Administration/Stig Nordaas





Reconnaissance visits between 28 January and 2 February allowed the team to evaluate the spill's dispersal and discern between the contamination's behaviour in different settings. Overall, there was a more noticeable accumulation in rockfilled coves and cliff areas that are generally harder to clean and may become sources of secondary contamination with longer-lasting effects.

Photos: 1. CEDRE/Fanny Chever, 2-4. Norwegian Coastal Administration/Stig Nordaas

Flatter areas with beach cleanup operations saw decreasing levels of contamination over time as crews worked to collect oil from the water and polluted sand for transportation to the refinery for proper treatment and disposal.

Photo: OCHA/Marc Belanger





To respond effectively to future emergencies, incident command systems that integrate all who are responsible for clean-up operations must be in place while national and sub-national authorities continue building capacities in carrying out damage evaluations and needs assessments.

Photo: OCHA/Marc Belanger

After The Spill: The Human Impact

The spill's impact is reaching far beyond the immediate natural environment. Vulnerable communities who rely on the sea are facing uncertain futures amid beach closures, safety concerns and limited options.

Overcoming the spill requires more than removing oil from polluted seas and shores. While clean-up efforts are already giving way to recovery and lessons learned for the next potential disaster, local families are still facing uncertainty over their futures. Hundreds of families in these largely impoverished districts are seeking answers now that their livelihoods have come to an abrupt halt.

The affected districts are home to more than 482,000 people, **many** of whom live in improvised housing settlements with limited access to basic services. According to the 2017 national census, about a fifth of this population work in agriculture and fishing and as small vendors, a broad figure that can help pinpoint the groups that will be left most vulnerable in the wake of the spill. These groups include fishing families that depend on one of the most productive seas in the world for their livelihoods and, in some cases, food security, and local business owners such as small restaurants and tourism-dependent vendors.

The spill also comes as these groups continue to endure the socioeconomic fallout of Peru's COVID-19 pandemic, one of the worst in the world. Peru's rate of 6,197 COVID-19 deaths per 1 million people (as of 17 February 2022) is more than any country in the world and more than 1,100 higher than the second-highest rate.

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Even where beaches may not be officially closed, authorities have qualified dozens of them as contaminated and are warning against visiting them until further notice. Communities such as Costa Azul, Ancón and Cavero Beach have seen their once-bustling activity come to a halt.



Costa Azul, January 2013 Photo: Andina (State news agency)



Small businesses like the *Cevichería Karla* seafood restaurant at the Costa Azul beach in Ventanilla are already taking a crippling blow.

"There's no business right now. We've been here for 30 years, and usually sell about 2,000 soles (US\$500.00) a day, **now we're barely** selling 1 dish a day since the spill.

We haven't been able to speak to anyone about what's happening. No one's even contacted us for providing food to the clean-up crews. We don't know how long this is going to go on for or what we can do." *

* Name withheld Photo: OCHA/Marc Belanger

Various State offices, including Peru's Ombudsman's Office, and NGOs that work with trade groups involved in various affected industries warn that the continued lack of access to the sea and beach activities will continue to threaten livelihoods.

These groups add that the affected communities, which include some 1,500 fishing families and 1,500 tourism-related workers, also require more information on next steps and support to cover their food and livelihood needs.



Costa Azul, February 2022 Photo: OCHA/Marc Belanger

Workers involved in fishing, ship chartering, dock working and tourism have banded together to voice their need for support. Many are dealing with an immediate threat to livelihoods and food access as they wait for a healthy marine environment to be restored.

National trade groups and private sector organizations are generously providing affected communities with recurring food donations over the coming weeks.

Long-term food security for these groups and their families is likely to remain a priority for the foreseeable future.

Various State offices, including the Ministry of Exterior Commerce and Tourism, the Ministry of Production, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Economy and Finance have been collaborating on developing compensatory bonuses for people active in these sectors.

Photos: OCHA/Marc Belanger











An effective response requires more comprehensive evaluations, analysis and community engagement to learn more about affected people's needs now that their means of income have been compromised.

Targeted information gathering will allow for better profiling of needs according to gender, age and location, while feedback mechanisms serve to increase community participation in response and recovery plans and ensure a transparent response and accountability to those affected.

The team's UNDAC members worked to learn about ongoing engagement efforts from affected communities and from INDECI teams who were on the ground helping build registries of affected families. This registrybuilding process seeks to ensure that the various organizational efforts work with a common knowledge base on those who require the most support.

Photos: OCHA/Marc Belanger

The environmental emergency caused by the 15 January 2022 oil spill and its socioeconomic impact are creating hardships for these communities that will last well past the JEU mission's conclusion. These communities must also continue dealing with the ever-present risks of recurrent climate shocks and geophysical and hydrological hazards that affect thousands of people in Peru every year.

The JEU team worked closely with the UN System in country, led by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, so that UN organizations can continue supporting the Government and working with national and international partners to help strengthen Peru's resilience in the wake of the spill.







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The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) respond as one UN to the environmental dimensions of emergencies. The partnership assists countries affected by disasters and crises and works to enhance the sustainability of humanitarian action.