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Two oil spills strike Eilat Bay over weekend

By SHARON UDASIN
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MK Henin: "During the deliberations of the subcommittee on oil dangers in the Gulf of Eilat, we discovered an alarming picture of neglect and an inability to cope."

Two oil spills tainted the waters off Eilat this weekend – one on Friday morning, and another on Saturday morning.

Saturday's spill was caused by a Turkish-owned Panamanian ship, while the source of Friday's remains unknown, but it is suspected to have come from the same source, the Environmental Protection Ministry said on Saturday.

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Friday morning's spill of light fuel oil was discovered in the Coral Beach area, located between the Tur-Yam Marina and the border of the protected coral reserve, while Saturday's leakage was pinpointed as emanating from a ship docked in the port of Eilat, which was carrying the Panamanian flag, but under Turkish ownership, according to the ministry.

The ship was detained and investigated by the Environmental Protection Ministry's Marine and Coastal Environment Division, a statement from the ministry said.

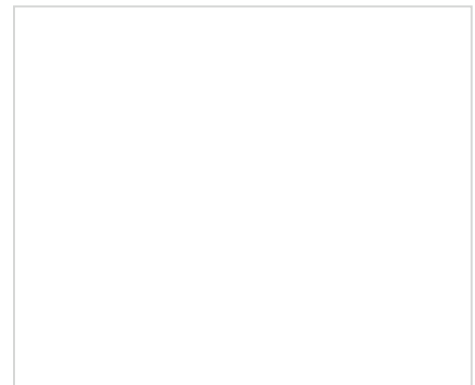
Workers from the ministry's Marine Pollution Prevention Station in Eilat joined members of the Nature and Parks Authority – as well as volunteers from the Eilat Field School and others from the Eilat-Eilat region – to stop Friday's spill using a special device owned by the ministry.

The mess was cleaned by Friday afternoon and contamination amounted to about five tons of light fuel oil. According to the statement, 20 barrels of oil and another six cubic meters worth of absorptive materials were pumped out.

Saturday's spill was treated by the same collaborative team, and by the time of publication had extracted an estimated five tons of oil from the leak, but the extraction was ongoing, according to the ministry.

An assessment of the situation would continue until late in the evening, a statement said, until the situation returns to normal.

In reaction to the spillages, MK Dov Henin (Hadash), chairman of the Knesset's Environment and Health



Committee, lambasted those opposed to the enactment of amendments to the 1952 Petroleum Law, which would provide for protections against such oil crises, his spokesman said.

“In the current situation, an oil disaster in Israel is only a question of time,” Henin said at a public hearing in Nahariya on Saturday. “During the deliberations of the subcommittee on oil dangers in the Gulf of Eilat, we discovered an alarming picture of neglect and an inability to cope.”

“Oil drillings planned in the Mediterranean Sea bring with them new risks,” he continued.

“The Mediterranean cannot handle a disaster such as that of the Gulf of Mexico. The obsolete Petroleum Law of 1952, which doesn’t include any environmental protection measures whatsoever, is no longer suitable for Israel, and we must repair it urgently and add the environmental protection measures that we have proposed.”

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