

Wildlife Emergencies

FACTSHEET

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Wildlife Impacted by Marine Pollution

No:

Marine pollution in Victoria

Throughout the year small numbers of oiled seabirds (mostly penguins) turn up on Victoria's coastline. The number of these incidents is decreasing due to successful prosecutions of marine polluters. Wildlife rehabilitation organisations can respond to these types of small incidences.

In the event of a major pollution emergency in the marine environment it is likely that a large number of wildlife would be affected.

When was the last major oil spill?

The last major oil spill in Victoria was on the 28 February 2003 when 25-30 tonnes of bunker fuel was discharged into Bass Strait. Oil washed up on beaches at Cape Woolamai and Kilcunda, resulting in 41 oiled seabirds. These included Little Penguins, Hooded Plovers, Silver Gulls and a Pied Cormorant.

What are the effects of pollutants on wildlife?

Effects of pollutants on wildlife can include:

- ingestion causing chemical poisoning
- external effects such as skin lesions and irritation or ulceration of the eyes
- destruction of the insulation and water proofing properties of the feathers, making seabirds susceptible to temperature variations and hypothermia (chilling).

Who is responsible for marine pollution response?

The Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV) lists Marine Safety Victoria (MSV) and port authorities as the control agencies responsible for managing marine pollution emergencies.

The marine pollution response is managed according to the *Victorian Marine Pollution Contingency Plan (VicPlan)*. *VicPlan* was established under the *National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil (NatPlan)*, developed by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

For more information relating to *VicPlan* please visit the Marine Safety Victoria website at www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au.

For more information relating to *NatPlan* please visit the Australian Maritime Safety Authority website at www.amsa.gov.au.

What is the department's role in caring for wildlife affected by marine pollution?

As a support agency, DSE manages the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by a marine pollution emergency, with assistance from Parks Victoria and the Phillip Island Nature Park.

DSE responds to a marine pollution incident in accordance with arrangements under the *Wildlife Response Plan for Marine Pollution Emergencies*.

This plan provides safe procedures and guidelines for the rescue, humane treatment



Photo: Phillip Island Nature Park

and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by pollutants in the marine environment.

It specifies roles and responsibilities in dealing with affected wildlife, with priority treatment going to threatened species and with the aim of returning as many animals as possible to the wild.

Activities carried out during oiled wildlife rescue operations include:

- the search and rescue of oiled wildlife
- initial triage of oiled wildlife
- transportation to a rehabilitation centre
- rehabilitation of oiled wildlife until able to be released, and it is safe to do so (i.e. their habitat is no longer oiled)
- post-spill monitoring.

Handling oiled wildlife can be **dangerous** and requires adequate training to prevent injuries to both people and wildlife.

Oiled wildlife are generally treated at the Phillip Island Nature Park treatment facilities or by other authorised wildlife rehabilitators with relevant experience.

Interested Volunteers - What can you do to help?

Depending on the scale of the emergency, volunteers can play a vital role in helping rescue and clean oiled wildlife during a marine pollution emergency. Volunteers can assist in the search and rescue, cleaning and rehabilitation of wildlife, record keeping and other helpful activities.

It is important that volunteers remember that the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by marine pollution is managed by DSE. Volunteers wanting to assist in an emergency response must register with the DSE Volunteer Coordinator and follow their instructions.



Photo: Phillip Island Nature Park

If you are interested in volunteering in oiled wildlife rescue, it is a requirement that you undertake training by Phillip Island Nature Park or be affiliated with a Victorian wildlife rehabilitation organisation.

Phillip Island Nature Park also supports volunteer organisations that are involved in revegetation, species monitoring and rehabilitation of injured wildlife.

For more information about volunteering, call the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

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