

Relevant Topic

Wildlife Stream

Title

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response – Perspectives in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Oil spills are known to have extensive environmental, social, and economic impacts, with the oiling of wildlife as one of the most publicly visible environmental effects. The images of oil-coated birds, sea turtles and seals connect to the human emotions of pity and anger. Photos of oiled wildlife from the Exxon Valdez to the BP Macondo oil spills spark an almost visceral outrage from the public. The effects of oil on wildlife such as birds, reptiles and mammals are widely recognized and can be fatal without human intervention. Therefore, there are not only legal grounds in many countries, for the need to prepare and respond to incidence of oiled wildlife, but also ethical and animal welfare considerations. Such considerations call for national authorities to minimize the suffering of wildlife affected by setting up an appropriate oiled wildlife preparedness and response system.

Contrary to common perception, oiled wildlife response activities are not limited to the rehabilitation of affected wildlife. Preparedness is key in minimizing the destructive impacts of any oil spill including having wildlife response plans in place for the protection of wildlife and the environment. According to industry good practice (IPIECA & IOGP, 2014), wildlife response plans should be based on an analysis of areas at risk and vulnerable species, potential response options and should be translated into the required real-world capability (people and equipment) to respond effectively.

In addition, the authors advocate that building of oiled wildlife response capability should not be viewed independently of oil spill response and planning. This includes integration of primary and secondary response strategies into the existing incident management structure and to further assimilate wildlife response procedures and trained personnel into oil spill response

operations. Relevant authorities and stakeholders should leverage on existing national plans for oil spill response and examine the integration of oiled wildlife response into these plans and procedures. To achieve seamless integration, expertise knowledge on management of both oil spill response and oiled wildlife response is imperative.

Southeast Asia is no stranger to oil spill incidents. The region has the busiest ports in the world and major shipping routes such as the Malacca and Singapore Straits. Furthermore, there is extensive oil and gas exploration activities which further increase the risk of oil spill incidents.

While there have been major oil spill incidents in the region, there is limited information or reported incidents of oiled wildlife. Publicly available documentation on oiled wildlife during an oil spill incident could be found for the Eoikos spill and Bunga Kelana III spill (Singapore waters) and Rena spill and Nakhodkha spill (outside of Southeast Asia and within Asia Pacific). While there is extensive records and statistical reports provided for the Rena and Nakhodkha spills, there is no such information available for other spills in the region.

Reasons for apparent under reporting might be attributed to:

- lack of regulatory framework or plans pertaining to oiled wildlife management;
- potential lack of awareness on issues of oiled wildlife management;
- an indication that the welfare of wildlife is not a priority during preparedness and response; or
- possibly limited to no wildlife impact.

In all Southeast Asian countries, there is no regulatory requirement on the industry with regards to oiled wildlife response. While Malaysia and Philippines have a formal guideline to oiled wildlife response, there is no such guideline available for other Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, it could be argued that the lack of regulatory frameworks in the region is the primary reason among those quoted above. The gap in the regulatory space contributes to potential lack of awareness in general of oiled wildlife management and absence of oiled wildlife response planning. Providing targeted recommendations to policy makers and industry leaders would certainly accelerate the development of oiled wildlife planning and management in the Southeast Asian region.

This paper aims to examine what mechanisms are in place for managing oiled wildlife risks, as well as the potential development for its integration into response management structure and identification of resources and equipment needs within the region. Relevant national legislations of selected Southeast Asian countries, where available, were reviewed to assess regulatory processes available on oiled wildlife response. Case studies are revisited to glean lessons learnt in other parts of the world and examine its applicability in the region.

From the assessment of selected Southeast Asian countries, there appear to be significant gaps in comparison with international best practices. A general approach that can be adopted by various national competent authorities to improve on their response towards oiled wildlife are enumerated below:

1. Engage with all key stakeholders in a formal planning process to define response objectives, assess wildlife risk, develop response strategies and implement preparedness over time through investments in equipment, trainings and exercises.
2. Consideration of use of protection and clean-up plans in lieu of oiled wildlife plan. Such protection and clean-up plans could appropriately be utilized in prioritizing environmental sensitive areas at risk and mitigating the impacts of the oil spill if the said areas are affected by the oil spill.
3. By being Party to relevant international conventions [e.g., International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC), International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage, among others), there is an appropriate regulatory framework that would address the issues on clean-up and restoration of environmental sensitive areas affected by an oil spill incident and oiled wildlife capture, treatment, rehabilitation and include funding for such activities.
4. Consider opportunities for regional collaboration on preparedness efforts and on developing wildlife response capability
5. Utilise international expert organisations to support preparedness and response efforts

In summary, it is the intention of this paper is to provide useful learning points for other comparable countries and regions wishing to establish a more comprehensive mechanism towards oiled wildlife response in line with international good practice.

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