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Greenpeace Study Warns of Arctic Drilling Risks

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A training exercise off Anchorage to liquidate the effects of oil spills, captured on camera by the Alaska Satellite Facility.

Oil could float as far as 300 kilometers over five days if spilled from Gazprom's pioneering Arctic drilling rig, according to research commissioned by Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund that was released Tuesday.

A Greenpeace vessel, the Arctic Sunrise, approached the Prirazlomnaya oil rig in the Pechora Sea earlier this week to check on its performance.

Carried out by research center Informatika Riska, the study looked at the effects of a theoretical spill that releases 10,000 tons of oil into the environment.

Valentin Zhuravel, project manager at Informatika Riska, said the oil slick could drift as far as 300 kilometers northeast of the rig in a time span of five days, under one of the worst-case

scenarios.

But he conceded at a news conference that spills of that size happen once in 500,000 years, according to the center's mathematical model.

On the sidelines of the news conference, World Wildlife Fund Russia director Igor Chestin retorted that BP's spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 was about as likely. That disaster dumped at least 4.9 million barrels, or 653 million tons, into the sea.

A Greenpeace activist said Tuesday that Gazprom shouldn't do any drilling now because its cleanup plan for any potential oil spills had expired.

A spokeswoman for Gazprom Neft Shelf, the Gazprom subsidiary that runs the rig, said she wouldn't comment over the phone.

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