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Oil From Damaged Russian Tankers Reaches Sevastopol in Annexed Crimea

By AFP

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Volunteers clean up oil on a beach in southern Russia. **Dmitry Feoktistov / TASS**

Oil from two aging Russian oil tankers damaged in a storm last month has been detected near the shores of Sevastopol in annexed Crimea, local authorities said Friday.

The tankers, Volgoneft-212 and Volgoneft-239, were struck by a storm on Dec. 15 in the Kerch Strait, which connects the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea near Crimea and Russia's Krasnodar region.

The vessels carried 9,200 tons of heavy fuel oil, with an estimated 40% of the cargo spilling into the sea. Russian President Vladimir Putin described the incident as an "ecological disaster."

"A small oil slick reached Sevastopol today," the city's Russian-installed Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said on Telegram, sharing a video of the thick substance in the water.

Razvozhayev described the slick as around 1.5 meters (five feet) in width and length.

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Sevastopol, home to over half a million people and the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet, has been regularly targeted in Ukrainian attacks since the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Authorities in Russia say the type of oil involved, M-100 grade mazut, is difficult to clean up since it is dense and sinks below the water's surface. Russia's Transportation Ministry said that there is "no proven technology anywhere in the world to remove it from the water column."

Current cleanup efforts, relying heavily on volunteers, are focused on collecting oil after it washes ashore.

So far, 78,000 tons of contaminated sand and soil have been removed from beaches in Crimea and southern Russia, with total cleanup estimates reaching up to 200,000 tons, according to Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry.

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