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Russian Scientists Warn of Dangerous Levels of Carcinogen Along Black Sea Coast

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Emergency workers clean up oil on a beach in Krasnodar. **@opershtab23**

Russian scientists have detected dangerously high levels of a carcinogen in soil samples taken from beaches contaminated by the Black Sea oil spill, with one expert comparing the pollution to the U.S. military's use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Soil samples collected during cleanup efforts in the resort town of Anapa contained benzopyrene levels 22.5 times above the legal limit, environmental scientist Viktor Danilov-Danilyan told the Moskovsky Komsomolets tabloid Sunday.

Benzopyrene, a toxic compound also found in coal tar and tobacco smoke, poses serious health risks. Andrei Peshkov, an environmental scientist with Russian state honors, likened its effects to Agent Orange, the herbicide used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.

"[Benzopyrene] has an unfavorable, often lethal, effect on the body," Peshkov told Russian

media on Monday. “This is a bad story for our descendants.”

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The oil spill began on Dec. 15 when two Russian tankers were damaged in a storm off the coast of the southern Krasnodar region, releasing thousands of tons of heavy fuel oil into the Black Sea.

Emergency workers and volunteers, some of whom later sought medical attention for possible exposure to toxic fumes, have so far removed 175,000 metric tons of contaminated sand from the affected beaches.

President Vladimir Putin and scientists alike have described it as one of the worst environmental disasters to hit Russia in recent decades.

Russia’s environmental watchdog has threatened to sue those responsible for the spill but has not yet disclosed who it will take to court. The two oil tankers were operated by the company Volgatransneft, while the heavy fuel oil on board the ships belonged to the state oil firm Rosneft.

Environment Minister Alexander Kozlov told Putin that cleanup operations will not be completed until the summer of 2026.

Despite the ongoing environmental crisis, Russian authorities have arranged summer vacations for disabled children at Black Sea resort destinations, including Anapa, this spring and summer.

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