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Oil Slick Expands Near Sochi After Tanker Fire, Greenpeace Says

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Smoke from a burning tanker at sea near Sochi. **@exilenova_plus / Telegram**

An oil slick in the Black Sea near Russia's resort city of Sochi has expanded following a fire aboard a tanker attacked by sea drones earlier this week, Greenpeace said Friday, a day after authorities reopened beaches and reported no oil contamination.

The slick grew from 8 to 25 square kilometers over three days, the environmental group said, citing satellite images from Planet Labs.

Greenpeace said the slick extended along the route taken by the Aframax Rio after the attack. Around midday Wednesday, the tanker was near Lazarevskoye, about 50 kilometers from the site of the fire. By Thursday, it was near Tuapse. Environmentalists believe the vessel may be under tow to Novorossiysk.

Sochi and the neighboring federal territory of Sirius closed their beaches on Tuesday after the Liberian-flagged tanker caught fire following an attack attributed to Ukrainian sea drones.

Authorities reopened the beaches Thursday, saying tests found no oil contamination.

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Sochi's administration said seawater samples taken across the city met sanitary standards, according to consumer protection watchdog Rospotrebnadzor. Satellite monitoring also found no oil slicks, it added.

Sirius administration head Dmitry Plishkin said tests found no traces of oil in seawater and air pollution levels remained within permitted limits.

The tanker was attacked on the evening of Oct. 6. The fire sent thick black smoke over Sochi. Russia's Transportation Ministry said burning oil prevented rescue vessels from approaching the ship. The flames were extinguished on Wednesday.

All 23 crew members, who were Indian nationals, were rescued.

The amount of oil aboard the tanker has not been disclosed. The Mash Telegram news channel, citing unidentified sources, reported that the vessel was fully loaded.

The tanker continued to drift along the coast after the fire. Its operator, Executive Ship Management, said Wednesday that officials and two senior crew members had started inspecting the vessel to assess its condition.

Built in 2004, the Aframax Rio is 247 meters long and 42 meters wide, with a deadweight capacity of 107,100 metric tons.

According to the investigative outlet The Insider, the tanker has called at Russian Black Sea ports and is under Ukrainian sanctions. Kyiv has linked it to Russia's "shadow fleet," a network of tankers used to transport oil and circumvent sanctions.

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