

Big Pond News - Australia

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Oil spill keeps Singapore beaches closed

Singapore's most popular stretch of beaches remained shut on the first day of the city state's summer school holidays on Friday as emergency crews continued their cleanup of an oil slick.

Despite the mess and the closure, residents flocked to the seaside East Coast Park for picnics, jogging and cycling, even though they could not swim or frolic on the sand.

Signs on the tree-lined park advised the public to stay away from the affected beaches, warning them that the water was 'contaminated' by the slick, from an oil tanker damaged in a collision off Singapore on Tuesday.

The chocolate-coloured sludge that tainted the seawater and sand in parts of the park had begun to thin, witnesses said, and the strong, kerosene-like smell in the area over the past two days had eased.

But weather officials said rains forecast for late Friday and over the weekend could impede the cleanup efforts and rough seas could result in more oil patches being washed ashore.

Emergency crews continued cleaning up the beaches on Friday, shovelling oil-slickened sand into black plastic bags.

Officials estimate that about 7.2 kilometres of beach and rock bunds, or embankments, along the east coast were affected after winds and tides made containing the slick at sea difficult.

The slick came from the Malaysian-registered tanker MT Bunga Kelana 3, which was carrying nearly 62,000 tonnes of crude when it collided with the MV Waily, a bulk carrier registered in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

About 2500 tonnes of crude leaked from a gash on the double-hulled tanker's port side, officials said. Such tankers are designed to limit spillage in case of a rupture.

Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority said most of the leaked crude had been contained at sea.

Environmentalists said they were continuing to monitor the slick.

'We did find a lot of dead crabs covered in oil ... and four to five dead fish,' said Anbarasi Boopal of the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), who led a team that combed the beaches on Thursday.

The team scoured the beaches again on Friday, but said they will wait for the tide to ebb before they can better assess any damage.

'Intertidal species like the crabs are the ones that will be most affected because they have nowhere to run. If we don't find them they might die,' said ACRES chief Louis Ng.