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No more oil stains at beaches along Changi and East Coast

By Daryl Chin

The beaches along the East Coast and Changi have been cleared of oil stains and there are no longer oil patches in the waters just off Singapore.

However, last Tuesday's spill has spread farther north to Malaysia.

Although Singapore's National Environment Agency (NEA) said beaches have been cleaned up, affected coastal areas remain closed pending ongoing checks on water quality.

"The water quality is expected to take a few days to return to normal. Members of the public are advised to refrain from swimming or engaging in water activities in these areas until further notice," an NEA spokesman said yesterday.

The agency also noted that it has not detected any toxic chemicals in the air that will pose health risks.

Elsewhere, the cleaning of Chek Jawa, a nature reserve which is home to a diverse ecosystem on Pulau Ubin, is almost complete, with only small patches of oil film visible on water's surface.

While still open to visitors, the National Parks Board (NParks) has suspended guided walks at the reserve until June 13.

Already, 60.4 tonnes of oil contaminated sand bags have been removed from the beaches and disposed of at Semakau offshore landfill. More will be collected this week.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) said passing ships and aircraft had noticed further patches of oil in Malaysian waters and the shipping lanes to the East of Singapore.

MPA has informed its Malaysian counterparts of this and has offered assistance, it added.

Closer to home, MPA said that several oil patches – each about 50m long- sighted off the SAF Yacht Club facilities at Admiralty Road West had been cleaned up. But the possibility of small isolated patches of oil with debris remained.

Going forward, the agencies involved have said they will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The pollution is the result of a collision between an oil tanker and bulk carrier last Tuesday morning. As a result, some 2,500 tonnes of oil spilled into the water and caused a 4 sq km slick.

To date, NEA and ship operator AET have mobilised about 500 workers to clean up the oil on affected beaches, including 14 NEA officers who continue to keep an eye on East Coast Park, Changi Beach and Pulau Ubin.

NEA also used the opportunity to conduct a trial last Friday on a new technology for oil contamination clean-up at a jetty along East Coast Beach.

Named “Eco-Blue-Industrial Blend”, the plant –derived water-based, readily biodegradable solution serves as a clean-up and mitigation agent for use on a wide range of hydrocarbon products.

According to its supplier Green Clean Dynamics, the blend biodegrades and breaks down the oil progressively within 28 days.