

'Nobody understands' spills at Alberta oil sands operation

Written by Joan Russow
Friday, 19 July 2013 18:11 -



By: Emma Pullman and Martin Lukacs Special to the Star,

https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/07/19/nobody_understands_ongoing_spills_at_alberta_oilsands_operation.html Published on Fri Jul 19 2013



Photos provided by a government scientist show the site of an oil spill in Cold Lake, Alta. The company that runs the operation says it is effectively managing the cleanup.

Oil spills at an oil sands operation in Cold Lake, Alberta have been going on for weeks with no end in sight, according to a government scientist.

Oil spills at a major oil sands operation in Alberta have been ongoing for at least six weeks and have cast doubts on the safety of underground extraction methods, according to documents obtained by the Star and a government scientist who has been on site.

Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. has been unable to stop an underground oil blowout that has killed numerous animals, and contaminated a lake, forest, and muskeg at its operations in Cold Lake, Alta.

The documents indicate that, since cleanup started in May, some 26,000 barrels of bitumen

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mixed with surface water have been removed, including more than 4,500 barrels of bitumen.

Photos View gallery

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The scientist said Canadian Natural Resources is not disclosing the scope of spills in four separate sites, which have been off bounds to media and the public because the operations are on the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, where there is active weapons testing by the Canadian military.

The company says it is effectively managing and cleaning up the spills.

“The areas have been secured and the emulsion is being managed with clean up, recovery and reclamation activities well underway. The presence of emulsion on the surface does not pose a health or human safety risk. The sites are located in a remote area which has restricted access to the public. The emulsion is being effectively cleaned up with manageable environmental impact,” the company said in a statement.

The documents and photos show dozens of animals, including beavers and loons, have

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died, and that 30,600 kg of oily vegetation has been cleared from the latest of the four spill zones.

The company's operations use an "in situ" or underground extraction technology called "cyclic steam stimulation," which involves injecting thousands of gallons of superhot, high-pressure steam into deep underground reservoirs. This heats and liquefies the hard bitumen and creates cracks through which the bitumen flows and is then pumped to the surface.

The scientist, who asked not to be named for fear of losing their job, said the operation was in chaos.

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Video



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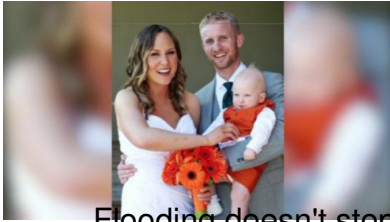


Raw Video: Flooding aftermath in High River

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- Flooding doesn't stop Calgary couple's wedding



~~with Flood relief assistance in Calgary, residents have been told not to return to their homes until it is safe to do so. The city is providing emergency assistance to residents who have been displaced by the flooding. For more information, please contact the city at 403-243-7000.~~

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