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Oil Spills

Oil spills are never good. They cause chaos, harm the environment, and are hard to deal with. Two examples of well-known oil spills are the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989, and the Yellowstone River spill of 2015. The Exxon spill, which occurred in Alaska, dumped around 11 million gallons of oil into the waters. The Yellowstone River spill, which occurred in Montana, dumped around 50,000 gallons of oil into the river. These two oil spills are two examples of how drastic oil spills can be and send a message that measures need to be taken to prevent them from happening.

The Exxon Valdez spill occurred on March 24th, 1989, off the coast of Alaska. An oil tanker was on its way to California when it struck a reef, subsequently spilling almost 11 million gallons of oil into the surrounding waters after the hull of the ship was torn open.¹ In terms of damage to the environment, the spill has been recorded as the worst. “The oil killed and injured seabirds, sea otters, harbor seals, bald eagles, orcas and other wildlife.”² Exxon spent a

¹ “Exxon Valdez Oil Spill.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 3 Nov. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exxon_Valdez_oil_spill.

² Andrew Hartsig Author, et al. “Exxon Valdez: 29 Years Later.” *Ocean Conservancy*, 25 Mar. 2021, oceanconservancy.org/blog/2018/03/22/exxon-valdez-29-years-later.

combined \$4 billion in damages, \$2 billion for cleanup and another almost \$2 billion in environmental restoration costs. The clean-up operation took around 3 years to complete.

Flash forward another 26 years to the Yellowstone River in Montana, on January 17th, 2015. This oil spill was a bit different than the Exxon one, as it did not involve a ship crashing into something. However this time, it involved a breach in an oil pipeline underneath the river, owned by Bridger Pipeline LLC. Around 50,000 gallons of oil was spilled into the river, and residents resorted to drinking only bottled water as the tap water became contaminated.³ The clean up was put on hold, however, as those involved had to wait until the ice on the river melted. The owner of the pipeline was forced to pay \$1 million to the state of Montana in damage costs.⁴

As with any oil spill, cleanup is never fun. It is very time consuming, and costs endless amounts of money. As with the Exxon spill, lots of money was involved. Exxon paid almost \$4 billion in costs to get rid of the spilled oil, as well as restoring the habitats that were damaged in the spill. For the Yellowstone River spill, the cleanup did not happen exactly on schedule. It had to be put off a while due to the fact that ice on the river needed to be melted before they proceeded. Eventually the owner of the pipeline paid damage costs to the state of Montana.

As you can see from these two spills, oil spills are not good. They cause a lot of damage to the surrounding area, including the habitats of many organisms. When it comes time to

³ "Yellowstone River." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 9 Oct. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellowstone_River#2015_oil_spill.

⁴ Gazette, Matt Hudson / Billings. "\$1m Fine Levied for 2015 Oil Spill in Eastern Montana." *Grand Forks Herald*, Grand Forks Herald, 11 Feb. 2017, www.grandforksherald.com/news/4216231-1m-fine-levied-2015-oil-spill-eastern-montana.

cleanup the spills, endless amounts of money goes into fixing the trouble. The key take away from this all is that things needs to be done to prevent future spills from occurring. If we can all find a way to prevent oil spills from happening, it will not just go a long way for us, but for the marine organisms who have no control over these spills.

Sources

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