

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact:

Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director, Columbia Riverkeeper
(503) 348-2436
bv@columbiariverkeeper.org

100 Gallon Oil Spill at Ice Harbor Dam the Latest in Government's History of Oil Pollution from Columbia and Snake River Dams

HOOD RIVER, OR—On May 7th the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported a 300 gallon oil spill from the Ice Harbor Dam, located on the Snake River in eastern Washington. According to a Washington Department of Ecology report obtained by Columbia Riverkeeper, 100 gallons of hydraulic fuel oil entered the Snake River. The oil spill caused a 10-by-300 foot oil sheen on the river. Following the oil spill discovery, the Corps failed to notify the public on its website or release a media advisory.

The last major oil spill at the Ice Harbor Dam occurred in early 2012, when the Corps reported discharging over 1,500 gallons of PCB-laden transformer oil.

“The Corps might own the dams, but they don’t own the rivers,” stated Brett VandenHeuvel, Columbia Riverkeeper’s Executive Director. “People fish, swim, and boat just downstream of Ice Harbor and other dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The Corps knows it has a chronic problem with oil spills. How many more oils spills need to happen before they take action?”

Oil pollution spilling and leaking from hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers is a chronic problem. In August 2013 Columbia Riverkeeper, a non-profit organization based in Hood River, Oregon, sued the Corps for its chronic problem of spilling oil into the Columbia and Snake Rivers from hydroelectric dams including Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and Ice Harbor dams. The lawsuit is pending in the Eastern District of Washington.

According to the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA), oil spills can harm living things because its chemical constituents are poisonous. Oil can also smother some small fish or invertebrates and coat feathers and fur, reducing birds’ and mammals’ ability to maintain their body temperatures.

“We are calling on the Corps to come clean,” states VandenHeuvel. “The dams are part of a larger pollution problem on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, and everyone—including the Corps—needs to do their part to make our rivers safe for swimming and fishing.”

According to the Washington Department of Ecology's spill response report, "inexperienced workforce" and "less than adequate procedures" are to blame for the oil spill.

Riverkeeper is represented by the legal team at Seattle-based Smith & Lowney PLLC, <http://www.smithandlowney.com/>.

About Columbia Riverkeeper

Columbia Riverkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean. The organization promotes a diverse coalition of people working to restore a Columbia River where people can safely catch fish and children can play without fear of toxic exposure.