



## Nature and the Environment in the News

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### Central coast oil slick mystery spreads

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QUANG NAM — Despite great efforts, authorities have been unable to determine the source of the oil slick first discovered last Wednesday and spreading rapidly across the central coast since. The Quang Nam task force said by Friday 120 kilometers of the province's coastline had been covered in a film of oil.

Da Nang's Department of Natural Resources and Environment said the slick had also reached some beaches in the city and the provinces of Thua Thien-Hue and Quang Tri, all to the north of Quang Nam.

Colonel Tran Van Thanh, Commander of Air Division A372, said on Friday morning a helicopter had been dispatched to search for the source of the slick.

"The patrol crew found three other oil slicks about 400 meters from Da Nang beach, each about 200 meters across. Unfortunately, they could not find the origin."

Ha Son Hai, director of the central-based Zone II Oil Spill Response Centre, said the most vital but also difficult thing was to locate the source of the slick.

"Because we have not determined the source we cannot use proper measures to clean it up.

"Now, we can only clean up the oil where we see it. This method is ineffective and requires a lot of money and time."

### Cleaning up

Hoi An town, among the first to be hit by the slick, has almost completely cleaned up its coast. Truong Van Bay, vice chairman of the town People's Committee, said: "Right after the slick was discovered [we] took the initiative to mobilise people to clean it up."

It cost over VND100 million. Nguyen Su, secretary of the Hoi An Party Committee, said every day the town had called up more than 500 people who had worked 16 hours a day to clean up the beach. "We mopped up about 60 tonnes of oil," he said.

Lieutenant General Nguyen Huu Soat, Vice Chairman of the National Committee for Search and Rescue, wrote to the Quang Nam Province and Da Nang City people's committees to clean up the oil from the beaches and head off any damage to the environment.

After being collected, the oil must be transported to the Oil Spill Response Centre or to local environment protection agencies for burning, the letter added.

In response to Soat's appeal, the Quang Nam People's Committee instructed local agencies to mobilise people and equipment to quickly mop up the oil and send it to the centre.

The centre's deputy director, Nguyen Tran Manh, assured his agency had the necessary equipment to deal with the oil and protect the environment. "After the spill is cleaned the sea will be treated with a special solvent," he said.

### **Possible sources**

Hai of the Zone II centre suggested the slick could have drifted in from international waters. "The oil could have come from a sinking tanker or drilling activities at sea.

"But it was possibly caused by an oil tanker intentionally pumping sludge into the sea which then floated into Vietnamese waters." Other experts backed his oil exploration theory saying the slick might have been caused by the oil spilt periodically from offshore wells.

Nguyen Hien, head of the Hoi An Department of Natural Resources and Environment, said the slick had been identified as fuel oil which did not break up in water. "This means the oil will not poison the waters," he said.

Hoi An's Golden Sand Hotel said occupancy had fallen by 10 per cent in the last few days due to the oil slick. — VNS