

Brazilian Oil Spill Hurts 3,000 Fishermen

Contributed by Aline Beckestein
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The State Environmental Control Commission from the southeastern Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro will receive a report today from the Rio's Environmental Engineering Foundation (Feema) and is expected to release the data concerning the oil spilled in Guanabara Bay by the Bahamian-flag ship, the Saga Mascote.

The amount of the fine to be paid by the shipowner should also be announced. In a preliminary report, Feema technicians stated that eight beaches along the Niterói shoreline were affected by the oil. Icaraí, in Niterói, was the most heavily hit.

The ship collided with a pier during docking maneuvers last Saturday night, September 3, at the Enavi-Renave shipyard, on Conceição Island, in Niterói.

The Z-8 Fishermen's Colony in Niterói estimates that at least three thousand fishermen were harmed by the more than 2 thousand liters of oil spilled into Guanabara Bay.

A survey is still underway to determine how many of the 12 thousand fishermen associated with the colony work in the area affected by the accident. Fishing has been prohibited in this area.

The secretary of the colony, José Pulgas, said that the losses suffered by the affected workers "must have been substantial, since we are in the reproduction period for mussels and crabs and the spawning season for sardines." He also affirmed that the colony has received many complaints from fishermen whose fishing gear was damaged by the oil.

Pulgas also informed that they are only awaiting the Feema and Federal Police reports on the accident in order to start negotiating compensation payments with the shipowners or their Brazilian representatives.

"We want to discover who is responsible for the ship and try to work out a settlement. This will be the first approach, before taking the case to court, since the indemnifications for these kinds of accidents never reach the fishermen.

"We have been battling for five years to receive compensation from Petrobras for the accident in 2001, and so far we haven't received anything," he said.

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