

Rowena Oil Spill

Background

Oregon DEQ is overseeing investigation and cleanup of a diesel spill that occurred at a rail siding in Rowena on February 13, 2004. The spill was discovered by Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) when a crew member noticed that one of three idling locomotives on a parked westbound train had shut off. The crew found the engine compartment sump full of diesel fuel. The cause of the malfunction was determined to be a cracked fuel filter.

The conductor called UPRR authorities and Oregon Emergency Response as the train made its way to Portland. UPRR and its emergency response contractor responded to the scene that evening with vacuum trucks, booms and sorbents. A preliminary review of fuel records indicated that between 1,500 and 2,000 gallons of diesel had been released at Rowena. UPRR subsequently conducted a more detailed evaluation of the amount of fuel lost. This assessment, submitted to Oregon DEQ on March 6, indicates that less than 1,000 gallons were released.



Emergency response personnel flush diesel fuel from ballast rock for collection in to vacuum trucks

The diesel fuel entered the ballast rock between the siding rails. Some then flowed to a shallow swale immediately north of the siding track, and was confined there between the tracks and a berm separating the swale from Rowena River Road. Measures were taken to prevent fuel from reaching two storm water culverts about 500 feet west of the spill location, at the railroad crossing. Water flow through these culverts discharges to a large ditch leading to the Columbia River, about 800 feet to the north. No fuel entered either of the culverts.

Heavy rains that started the morning after the spill flushed some of the diesel fuel into the swale. Emergency response personnel pumped the fuel-water mixture from this swale into tanker trucks. After the rain stopped, clean water was brought in by truck and sprayed on the tracks to continue the flushing process.

Follow-up

UPRR collected a total of 16,000 gallons of water-fuel mixture between February 15 and February 25. This included about 534 gallons of fuel.

Groundwater samples were collected on March 1 along the south side of Rowena River Road at four locations. Soil samples were collected at seven locations along the siding track on March 8. Lab results are expected by about March 22. DEQ will evaluate the appropriate next steps following review of these results.

Alternative Formats

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