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## **TASK FORCE MT. PRINCESS EMPRESS OIL SPILL INCIDENT**

### **SITUATIONAL REPORT NO. 9**

10 March 2023

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*Sources: Philippine Coast Guard, Office of Civil Defense, DENR EMB (incl. MIMAROPA and Region VI), DENR BMB, PENROs and CENROs*

#### **I. SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW**

On 28 February 2023, at approximately 04:16 AM, MT Princess Empress was reportedly half submerged in the vicinity waters of Balingawan Point, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro with 20 crews onboard and 800,000 liters of Industrial Fuel Oil. The vessel came from Bataan and was on its way to Iloilo when it encountered engine trouble due to overheating. At approximately 04:20 AM, all 20 crew members were rescued and brought to Subic Bay, Zambales.

On 01 March 2023, MT Princess Empress had completely submerged.

On 03 March 2023, a State of Calamity was declared in Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

On 04 March 2023, the Municipalities of Naujan, Pola, Bongabong, and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro as well as the Municipality of Caluya in Antique were reported to be affected.

On 06 March 2023, oil slicks were reported to have reached Agutaya, Palawan. Further, the location of MT Princess Empress has been determined and will be verified further, as relayed by DENR Secretary to Oriental Mindoro Governor Bonz Dolor via phone call.

Also, on 06 March 2023, a State of Calamity was declared in Caluya, Antique as well as the entire province of Oriental Mindoro.

## II. EFFECTS

### Affected Areas

As of 07 March 2023, nine (9) municipalities in Oriental Mindoro, one (1) municipality in Palawan, and one (1) municipality in Antique were reported to be affected.

REGION	PROVINCES	MUNICIPALITIES	REMARKS
MIMAROPA	Oriental Mindoro	1. Naujan 2. Pola 3. Pinamalayan 4. Gloria 5. Bansud 6. Bongabong 7. Roxas 8. Mansalay 9. Bulalacao	Whole province declared under State of Calamity
	Palawan	1. Agutaya	
Region VI	Antique	1. Caluya	Caluya declared under State of Calamity

### Effects to the Environment

Since 02 March 2023, there were observed fish kill and seeping of industrial fuel oil reaching the surrounding water bodies of Oriental Mindoro and Romblon, including mangrove areas and marine protected areas as a result of the oil spill.

Strong odor was noticeable during the conduct of water sampling along the coast of Tablas Strait, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. Black sticky substance was found within the shoreline of Brgys. Calima, Buhay na Tubig, and Bacawan in Pola, Oriental Mindoro while presence of oil film was observed in the coastal waters of Brgy. Lumangbayan, Pinamalayan, Oriental Mindoro.

Based on assessment by the DENR Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), the coastal and marine habitats in Pinamalayan and Bansud have generally less impacted coastal ecosystems compared to the barangays in Pola. Nevertheless, trails of the oil spill have been observed offshore in some of the Barangays in Pinamalayan and Bansud to which containment measures can be applied in order to prevent it from reaching the shores of these municipalities and in preparation for the possible change of wind direction in the following weeks.

### III. ACTIONS TAKEN

#### DENR Task Force

- DENR issues daily Department Statements / Press Statements to provide regular updates to the public.
- On 01 March 2023, the DENR Secretary, together with Key Officials from the Central Office, Regional Office MIMAROPA, Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer (PENRO) and Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer (CENRO) met with Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor and Naujan Municipality Mayor Henry Joel Teves to discuss the protection of marine and biodiversity resources and prevent further impacts.

In the afternoon, the DENR joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Council Meeting of Oriental Mindoro PDRRMC and coordinated with Petron and Shell to deploy equipment including oil spill booms. DENR Task Force MT Princess Empress Oil Spill was created with Undersecretary Marilou Erni as the Task Force Commander.

- On 02 March 2023, at approximately 03:00 PM, the DENR Task Force organized a meeting with PCG, the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR), the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (PDRRMO), and the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAO) for latest situation updates and to arrange the aerial assessment to be led by the DENR Secretary.

At approximately 04:00 PM, the DENR Secretary gave a video statement on the measures being taken by the Department based on the Strategic Action Plan of the Task Force.

The DENR Task Force has established linkage with the Incident Management Team to be jointly led by the Local Chief Executives, PCG and DENR using Unified Command approach.

The DENR Secretary authorized the mobilization of NAMRIA multibeam survey vessels to determine the exact location of the sunken vessel.

- On 03 March 2023, at approximately 7:00 AM, the Task Force led by the DENR Secretary departed Manila to conduct an aerial inspection of affected coastlines, and dialogue with local officials and the PCG in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. Present during the dialogue were Naujan Mayor Henry Joel Teves, Provincial Administrator, PDRRMO, BFAR, Municipal Agricultural Officer, DENR Undersecretary MGEN Augusto Dela Pena, DENR Undersecretary Carlos Primo David, DENR Assistant Secretary and concurrent Environmental

management Bureau (EMB) Director Gilbert Gonzales, Dr. Fernando Siringan of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), PENRO, and MENROs.

At approximately 10:00 AM, the DENR Task Force, led by Undersecretary Erni, met with the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) to discuss arrangements as to how the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) can augment the requirements for containment and cleanup.

The DENR Secretary departed Naujan, Oriental Mindoro at 10:15 AM and arrived at Villamor Airbase at approximately 11:00 AM. The DENR Secretary reported to the President at approximately 1:00 PM.

NAMRIA multibeam survey vessel, BRP Hydrographer Ventura, was mobilized to determine the exact location of the sunken vessel.

The DENR Secretary spoke with Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian at approximately 5:00 PM to coordinate a cash for work system for coastal cleanup.

The DENR Secretary reached out to Semirara at approximately 9:00 PM for coordination on cleanup in Caluya, Antique.

- On 04 March 2023, at approximately 7:30 AM, NAMRIA vessel BRP Hydrographer Ventura departed for Oriental Mindoro.

The DENR Secretary reached out to Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos, Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, Department of Health (DOH) OIC Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire, Palawan Congressman Jose Alvarez, and Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Trenas for mobilization and health and safety of LGUs involved in coastal cleanup and anticipatory action in Northern Palawan and Guimaras Strait.

The DENR Secretary continued to coordinate with DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian and he relayed that the cash for work support is ready in Mindoro.

The DENR Secretary reached out to Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma on possible use of the Tulong Panghanapbuhay para sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program funds as recommended by Undersecretary Leones. The DENR received a positive response.

At approximately 5:00 PM, the DENR Task Force led by Undersecretary Erni met with the NDRRMC Task Force led by OCD MIMAROPA Regional Director Eugene Cabrera to discuss updates and progress, as well as resolve collective issues and concerns. There will be a joint mechanism for situation reporting by the DENR, focusing on environmental matters, and the NDRRMC, for the overall report.

- On 05 March 2023, NAMRIA vessel BRP Hydrographer Ventura arrived early morning in Oriental Mindoro and gathered data before it was forced to return to Batangas due to rough seas.

The DENR Task Force led by Undersecretary Erni, together with Undersecretary Leones and other Regional officials, visited the Municipality of Pola, Oriental Mindoro. The team met various agency officials on the ground, including DOH OIC Undersecretary Vergeire following the ceremonial turn over of oxygen concentrators, drugs and medicines and other health emergency supplies and equipment. A dialogue was conducted with members of the local community. Present were the DENR Task Force, Oriental Mindoro Governor Bonz Dolor, DOH OIC Undersecretary Vergeire, and representatives from national agencies.

The Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) team arrived in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro to conduct a rapid assessment of affected coastal and marine habitats. In collaboration with UP MSI and UP Visayas, the team is currently developing strategies for rehabilitation, restoration, and regeneration of the affected ecosystems.

At approximately 4:00 PM, the DENR Secretary met the DENR Task Force via video teleconferencing to discuss situation updates and reiterate priorities for the Department. The contents of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOS COP) 2019 was also discussed by the Task Force, in which the leadership role of the PCG in the overall incident management for oil spill was recognized.

- On 06 March 2023, Undersecretary Erni met with DENR MIMAROPA Regional Executive Director Lormelyn Claudio to finalize arrangements for the cash for work system and undertake preparations for the meeting with Governor Dolor.

At approximately 9:30 AM, Secretary Loyzaga and other members of the DENR Key Officials met with DSWD Secretary Gatchalian via video teleconferencing to discuss updates on the cash for work system as well as a system of managing donations to be received.

At approximately 12:30 PM, Secretary Loyzaga informed Governor Dolor that BRP Hydrographer Ventura has determined the location of the vessel and will require further verification.

The BMB Assessment Teams were deployed in the Municipality of Pola to assess the Biodiversity and Social Impact of the oil spill as well as to conduct aerial surveys to measure its impact area. A total of nine (9) Barangays were targeted to be assessed including: Misong, Tagumpay, Puting Cacao, Tiguihan, Bayanan, Zone 1, Zone II, Batuhan, and Calima.

- On 07 March 2023, at approximately 08:30 AM, the DENR Secretary, along with other Key Officials, visited Oriental Mindoro via Presidential Bell 412 aircraft. The Secretary met with Governor Dolor at Pola to discuss next steps following the confirmation of the vessel's location. Among the priorities are the conduct of assessment to determine the appropriate filing of charges. Further, Governor Dolor manifested that the implementation of cash for work should be coursed through the Provincial Government to ensure accountability and avoid duplication of efforts.

At approximately 04:00 PM, the DENR Task Force convened for situation reporting. The meeting was presided over by Undersecretary Leones wherein it was agreed that teams are expected to provide timely updates on the results of water and air sampling and testing. Further, there should be careful and swift handling of disposal of oil wastes.

The BMB deployed three (3) teams to thirteen (13) barangays in the Municipality of Pinamlayan and Bansud, Oriental Mindoro.

- On 08 March 2023, the DENR Secretary reported updates to the President in connection with the oil spill. The updates highlighted the tanker's location, the actions taken by the DENR, process flow for the cash for work program, summary of donations monitored, and the ways ahead.

Further, three (3) teams from the BMB targeted to visit the Municipalities of Bongabong and Roxas with seven (7) and six (6) barangays, respectively. Also, BFAR's toxicity tests on fish are ongoing.

In addition, the Oriental Mindoro Coastal Resources Monitoring Team composed of BMB, PENRO Oriental Mindoro, CENRO Roxas, CENRO Socorro, and the Provincial Agriculturist's Office, assessed the degree of oiling in affected areas.

- On 09 March 2023, the Task Force led by Undersecretary Erni met with the team to discuss updates. Among the meeting highlights are the determination

of needs per Region as well as the clarification on the cash for work program. The standardization for reporting of waste collection as part of cleanup operations were also highlighted. There was also a discussion on proper management and observance of protocols for mangrove cleanup.

The BMB Rapid Assessment Teams were deployed to visit the municipalities of Mansalay, Bulalacao, and Gloria, with eight (8), three (3), and four (4) barangays, respectively.

- On 10 March 2023, the DENR Task Force was convened by the Secretary to discuss latest situation updates, particularly on the water and air quality assessment, the status of cash for work, the needs, and impact assessment.

During the meeting, the Regions MIMAROPA and VI presented the accomplishments as well as the summary of cleanup operations to the Secretary.

BRGYS (POLA)	OIL CONTAMINATED MATERIALS	
	VOLUME (Liters)	WEIGHT (Kgs)
CALIMA	3200	2800
MISONG	2300	2012.5
BATOHAN	800	700
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,300</b>	<b>5512.5</b>

Table 2: Accounting of Cleanup Operations in MIMAROPA

MUNICIPALITY	BARANGAYS	OIL WASTES		OIL CONTAMINATED WASTES	
		CUM. VOLUME (LITERS)	CUM. WEIGHT (KILOGRAMS)	CUM. VOLUME (LITERS)	CUM. WEIGHT (KILOGRAMS)
Semirara Island, Caluya, Antique	Barangay Tinogboc	2,500	2,400		444 sacks garbage/debris
	Barangay Semirara	NIL			518 sacks of Sea Grass/Sand 103 – one tonner garbage/debris contaminated with oil
Liwagao Island, Caluya Antique	Barangay Sibolo	600	576		20 Drums of Contaminated Sand Debris
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,100</b>	<b>2,976</b>		962 sacks of Sea Grass/Sand/Debris 103 – one tonner bags garbage/debris 20 drums sand/debris

Table 2: Accounting of Cleanup Operations in Region VI

The Secretary instructed the Task Force to arrange preparations for the briefing for foreign donors and organizations who will be offering assistance to the affected areas. The preparations will include the quantifying of specific needs as well as the composition of briefing teams.

Following the assessments done on, the BMB teams are set to conduct the exit conference at the Office of the PENRO in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro to consolidate observations and the ways forward.

### **DENR MIMAROPA, EMB MIMAROPA, PENRO and CENROs**

- On 01 March 2023, preliminary investigation and water sampling commenced in collaboration with PCG, BFAR and the local government units.

At approximately 8:00 PM, Assistant Secretary Gilbert Gonzales together with DENR Regional Officials met with PCG and BFAR to discuss updates. PCG was requested for assistance in terms of boats and other logistical provisions.

- On 02 March 2023, water samples were collected along the coast of Tablas Strait, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

At approximately 9:00 AM, PENRO commenced cleanup operations in areas with spotted oil spill from the shoreline covering the barangays of Calima, Buhay na Tubig and Bacawan, Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

At 10:00 PM, the Regional Environmental Laboratory of EMB MIMAROPA Region released the Result of Analysis based on the water samples collected from the established sampling stations in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro and ground zero (oil spillage area) on 01 March 2023.

The water samples collected from ground zero and seven (7) sampling stations namely: Estrella, San Jose 1, San Jose Proper, Pitugo Beach, Papangkil Beach, Montemayor Proper, and Tujod Fish Sanctuary, show that the water quality greatly exceeded the parameters for Oil and Grease as required under DENR Administrative Order No. 2016-08.

- On 03 March 2023, EMB MIMAROPA continued to conduct water sampling within the province of Marinduque.
- On 04 March 2023, coordination was made with the UP MSI to develop trajectory models to forecast the track and transport of the slick.

Several coordination visits were also made with DSWD Secretary Gatchalian, Governor Dolor, Pinamalayan Mayor Baldos, Bongabong Mayor Malaluan and



other key officials. Improvised spill booms using nets and coconut shingles were initiated to help Brgy. Misong in the Municipality of Pola.

Coordination has also been made with Coron, Palawan, in which it was found that the area was not affected by the oil spill as of the moment.

Air sampling was made using Tri-Gas Sampler at Brgy. Misong in Pola. The results shall be released within 2-3 days upon receipt of the samples at Optimal Laboratory, Lipa, Batangas.

- On 05 March 2023, DENR and EMB MIMAROPA, together with the PENRO and CENROs, facilitated proper hazardous waste management disposal at Brgy. Misong, Pola, Oriental Mindoro. Coordination has also been undertaken with accredited Treatment, Storage and Disposal (TSD) facilities.
- On 06 March 2023, UP MSI released its updated Trajectory Model for the oil spill for March 07 to 12.

Usec Leones, together with EMB Region VI met with DOLE MIMAROPA for the profiling of possible volunteers for the cash for work program.

RED Claudio also met with Governor Dolor to discuss the updates for the cash for work as well as the clarification on the leadership role of the PCG as provided for in the NOSCOP.

In the afternoon, the teams from the DENR and EMB MIMAROPA facilitated the disposal of collected oil wastes.

- On 07 March 2023, the results of the ambient air sampling were released. The parameters for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and Sulfur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) met the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Source Specific Air Pollutants from Industrial Sources/Operations under Republic Act 8749 otherwise known as The Philippine Clean Air Act.

Further, the list of households to join the cash for work program has been submitted to the Provincial Government of Oriental Mindoro.

Based on the results of analysis from the samples taken from the following sampling stations from March 1 to 6, the presence of oil and grease in waterbodies of Oriental Mindoro has exceeded the Water Quality Guidelines (WQG) under DENR Administrative Order No. 2016 – 08.

EMB Regional Director Joe Amil Salino also inspected the 120-meter spill booms installed by the PCG and Pola MDRRMO at Casimawawa River.

At approximately 10:40 PM, DENR and EMB Regional Offices met with the PCG to clarify the next steps for the cash for work program. The agreed ways forward include the identification of cleanup sites, securing of the list of individuals and fisherfolks to be involved and the provision of resource requirements.

- On 08 March 2023, Engr. Rochelle Padirayon, Chief, Toxic Chemicals and Hazardous Waste Monitoring Section, led the coordination meeting with PDRRMO Chief Vincent Gahol, Pola MDRRMO, PCG and PNP personnel on the establishment of collection points for hazardous materials collected during the cleanup.

At approximately 1:35 PM, EMB MIMAROPA led a briefing attended by the Philippine Army, PDRRMO, Pola MDRRMO in preparation for the hauling of hazardous wastes.

In the evening, the Chief, Provincial Environmental Management Unit (PEMU) Oriental Mindoro, received on behalf of EMB MIMAROPA various donations from First Gen Corporation. The donations included PPEs, materials for cleanup and other supplies.

- On 09 March 2023, a multi-sectoral meeting was led by Pola Mayor Cruz to tackle issues and concerns, including legal matters. Another inter-agency meeting was also held at the Incident Command Post (ICP) to discuss the coastal clean-up activities. There was also a meeting with the LGU and DSWD to discuss the next steps for the cash for work program.
- On 10 March 2023, the Regional Office participated in the simultaneous coastal cleanup activities in Pola. The teams provided technical assistance on the proper collection, storage and disposal of hazardous wastes collected during the cleanup. A total of 70 personnel for cash for work and 25 personnel from the harbour were deployed at Brgys. Misong, Tagumpay, Calima and Buhay na Tubig.

#### **DENR REGION VI, EMB REGION VI, PENRO and CENROs**

- On 03 March 2023, initial coordination was made with the Local Government of Caluya, Antique for updates and the Semimara Mining and Power Corporation (SMPC) for possible assistance.
- On 04 March 2023, EMB Region commenced planning for the conduct of inspection and water sampling. The installation of provisional spill booms made of locally available materials was also conducted.

EMB Region VI also attended the meeting with OCD Region VI and concerned agencies to discuss situation updates.

In response to the request for assistance, SMPC has provided 50 drums, 100 sacks, and fabricated rakes and spades for the cleanup to the Barangay Tinugboc Oil Spill Response Team.

- On 05 March 2023, based on water sampling, Brgys. Semirara and Tinogbog were found to be highly affected with the oil spillage. The Sampling Team also identified sites for Brgy. Algeria for possible contamination and comparison.

At approximately 11:31 AM, initial sampling was conducted on Station 1: Sitio Banwa, Brgy. Semirara. Based on observations, patches of oil sheens were seen on rock surfaces. Presence of oil traces was also seen on dried seagrass lining the shoreline. Oil is observed to be washed through wave action. No hauling of oil contaminated debris has been observed

EMB Region VI also participated in the PDRMC Meeting of Antique. The Council has been updated about the monitoring teams deployed by EMB in Semirara island. Requests for air and sea assets for transport have been made due to rough sea conditions.

- On 06 March 2023, the EMB Monitoring Team completed the sampling and site monitoring activity for the ten (10) identified sites in the island. Sitio Sabang, Brgy. Tinogbog, Semirara Island was observed to be the most affected out of the three barangays in the island. Seen on-site were six (6) units drums (200-liter capacity) full of collected oil and one (1) unit containing approximately 40 liter (1/5 of the drum) and 27 sacks containing oil contaminated sand.

Cleanup operations also resumed upon availability of PPEs from SMPC.

A meeting between DENR and EMB Region VI was conducted for the deployment of Rapid Assessment Team.

A total of ninety (90) individuals for possible enrollment for the cash for work program were identified by MENRO Caluya for endorsement to DOLE Region VI.

- On 07 March 2023, preparations were undertaken for the cash for work program for Semimara Island. Further, Regional Executive Director Levino Durna prepared to depart for Semirara Island.

Further, the PCG has arrived in Liwagao Island, Semirara. It was observed that the affected area is approximately a 2.0-kilometer stretch with an approximate 3 inch thickness of emulsified oil buried in the sand. The estimated waste to be collected is about 20 drums.

The Rapid Assessment Team of Region VI commenced preparations. The team included technical staff on mapping and other personnel who previously handled the Guimaras and Iloilo Oil Spill.

- On 08 March 2023, coastal cleanup commenced. Operations at the shorelines of Sitio Liwagao, Brgy. Sibolo, Liwagao Island resulted to the collection of 20 drums of oily wastes. The teams also completed approximately 400 meters of sorbent boom in the island.

Aerial observation using helicopter of the Philippine Air Force was jointly conducted. No sightings of oil spill offshore were observed Southeast of Semirara Island.

- On 09 March 2023, DENR and EMB Region VI reported the summary of the cleanup operations in Sitio Sabang.
- On 10 March 2023, DENR Region VI conducted site assessment and comparison on the status of the shorelines of a) Sitio Liwagao, Brgy. Sibolo, Liwagao Island, b) Sitio Sabang, Brgy. Tinogboc, Semirara island and c) Brgy. Semirara, Semirara Island. The assessment highlighted the need for careful cleaning of mangroves with supervision and monitoring of technical experts.

Further, coastal cleanup was conducted at the shorelines of Sitio Toong, Brgy. Semirara. A total of 49 sacks of wastes were collected. The Region also conducted its regular oil and grease water quality monitoring.

The Region also established sampling sites for ambient water quality monitoring and has closely coordinated with the PCG and LGU to update data on collected oil and oil contaminated materials. Likewise, the Region calibrated equipment for Ambient Air Quality Assessment for March 14 to 17.

#### **IV. WAYS AHEAD**

1. Sustain efforts for area assessments, water sampling, and air monitoring;
2. Validate the assessment results with the high-risk areas based on the UP MSI projections;
3. Coordinate with interagency scientific community on the conduct of environmental impact assessment and the provision of necessary guidelines for recovery and rehabilitation;
4. Secure availability of resources such as transporters and Treatment, Storage and Disposal (TSD) facilities for use in cleanup and waste management;
5. Specify needs in terms of items and services that can be sourced out by assisting donors, private organizations, development partners, academe, and members of civil society who signified intent to support;

6. Determine the estimated monetary value of potential damages incurred by the oil spill;
7. Execute arrangements with the DSWD, DILG, and DOLE on the augmentation for the cash for work scheme for the cleanup teams;
8. Ensure collaboration with other government agencies and organizations to perform respective mandates and functions in accordance with the NOSCOP 2019, highlighting the leadership role of the PCG; and
9. Undertake review and consultation with EMB Regional Offices, PCG and other stakeholders to possibly issue Notices of Violation to accountable parties, in accordance with Republic Act 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act, among other rules, regulations and policies.

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