

Imperial Oil well spills at Bourque Lake site

Crews clean up after crude bitumen emulsion leak

BY HANNEKE BROOYMANS, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM APRIL 28, 2011

EDMONTON - A leak from an Imperial Oil well spilled 2,500 barrels of crude bitumen emulsion this week at a site near Bourque Lake, 35 kilometres northwest of Cold Lake, the Energy Resources Conservation Board says.

Most of the emulsion, a mix of oil and water, remained on the lease site, board spokesman Bob Curran said. However, some of the emulsion from the crude bitumen well sprayed off the lease area. Some of it landed on ice covering most of the nearby lake.

A flyover Thursday morning showed a light sheen on the ice of the lake going out a few metres, Alberta Environment spokeswoman Cara Tobin said. The ministry sent staff to the site to ensure appropriate steps were taken to reduce the impact of the spill and clean it up.

Company employees are walking the shoreline, placing absorbent booms where there is a sheen, she said. A few feet along the water's edge has melted. "But the ice is pretty dangerous right now so they can't go out very far. They're looking at acquiring some airboats. But even that, they don't know if that will be safe either," she said

The company is mapping the area that needs to be cleaned and developing a cleanup plan. Tobin said she did not know how long the cleanup would take.

Imperial Oil spokesman Pius Rolheiser said the company discovered the leak Wednesday morning. "We immediately isolated the pad and made efforts to contain the oil on the pad site, which have largely been successful with the exception of some emulsified bitumen, like a mist, that made its way off-site."

Rolheiser said they immediately set up noise cannons to keep wildlife away from the area.

The well pad was built and the wells drilled in 2006. It's not yet known what caused the leak.

The ERCB said there are no residents in the area and no one was injured in the incident. All appropriate authorities were notified.

It appears the leak began Tuesday evening and ended Wednesday morning.

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