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Ecuador oil spill affected protected area in Amazon, government says

By Alexandra Valencia

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QUITO, Jan 31 (Reuters) - A burst pipeline in Ecuador caused an oil spill within a protected area of the country's Amazon rainforest, the environment ministry said on Monday, adding that the pipeline operator will face legal consequences.

A rock fall following rains in the Piedra Fina zone caused a part of the OCP heavy crude pipeline to split late on Friday, causing an oil spill which affected flora and fauna in the region, authorities said.

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"We were successful in containing the majority of oil that flowed from the pipeline," OCP Ecuador's executive president Jorge Vugdelija said in a statement on Monday.

"However, we are aware small traces have reached bodies of water, and we are working on it."

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Since 2020 regressive erosion advancing along the Coca river has caused problems for both the privately-operated OCP pipeline and the state-owned SOTE pipeline.

In December both pipelines suspended pumping due to the issue, leading the government **to declare** force majeure over the majority of the country's oil exports and production contracts.

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The government has started legal and administrative actions against OCP Ecuador, the ministry said, adding it has requested the company carry out a detailed investigation to measure the spill's impact.

Oil has been found on the Coca river's banks, according to communities living in the area. The river was previously affected by a major oil spill in April 2020 after both the OCP and SOTE pipelines burst due to the effects of the regressive erosion.

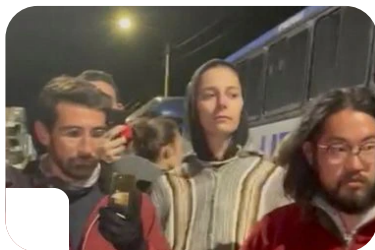
"Once again we have been polluted and we are fighting about it with OCP," Patricia Vargas, who heads the Panduyaku community in Ecuador's Sucumbios province, told Reuters.

Reporting by Alexandra Valencia Writing by Oliver Griffin Editing by Rosalba O'Brien



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