

An Oil spill in Mauritius



Do you know where the island nation of Mauritius is?

It is 1,200 miles (2,000 km) off Africa's east coast in the Indian Ocean. It is known for its beautiful beaches, reefs and lagoons. Mauritius depends on its seas for food and for tourism, boasting some of the finest coral reefs in the world.

Why are we discussing Mauritius?

On July 25, a Japanese ship ran aground on a reef near Pointe d'Esny, Mauritius. Although the crew of the ship was rescued, rough waters prevented teams from freeing the trapped ship. Cracks appeared on the ship over the next few days, and it has now leaked approximately 1,000 litres of oil into the island nation's surrounding waters.

Why is this terrible news for Mauritius?

The area under threat is home to several internationally protected sanctuaries. These sanctuaries host mangrove forests, coral reefs and sea grass meadows. They are home to turtles, 72 species of fish, and an exceptional coral diversity of 38 species from 15 families.

Spills like this are very detrimental to the turquoise waters and the life that lives in and around them. The chemicals that make up oil are toxic to plants and animals, including mangrove forests and the corals that build reefs. The black and sticky oils persist longer and can harm life in the sea and on the coasts.



This photo taken and provided by Eric Villars shows oil leaking from the MV Wakashio, a bulk carrier ship that recently ran aground off the southeast coast of Mauritius, Friday, Aug. 7, 2020. (Eric Villars via AP)

What are the locals doing to stop the oil from leaking?

Thousands of volunteers in Mauritius are working to keep leaking oil from spreading towards the island. Some volunteers are using make-shift absorbent barriers of straw stuffed into fabric sacks called booms to help stop the oil from spreading. Other volunteers are working to clean the polluted water and beaches. Wildlife conservationists are also moving some animals, such as baby tortoises and rare plants out of harm's way.

Mauritius' leaders say they've never faced a problem like this and weren't prepared for such a disaster. We hope they can save their beautiful beaches, reefs and unique plant and animal life.

