

Cleanup crews working on Pyramid Lake oil spill

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GORMAN – More than 100 people worked Thursday to clean up 126,000 gallons of crude oil that spilled into Pyramid Lake, a reservoir that holds water for Southern California cities.

The spill occurred Wednesday when a landslide ruptured a 14-inch, high-pressure pipeline, said Arthur G. Diefenbach, a senior vice president for Pacific Energy Partners, whose subsidiary, Pacific Pipeline Systems, owns the pipeline.

The 1,297-acre lake holds water for delivery to Los Angeles and other Southern California cities. It offers fishing, boating and other recreational opportunities but was not scheduled to open until May 1.

Water officials said they were not concerned about potential contamination of the region's drinking water.

Officials, however, were worried about possible threats to wildlife, but there were no initial reports of harm, Diefenbach said.

Booms and oil skimmers were being used to contain the spill, and three cofferdams were made to prevent any more oil from pouring into the lake, Diefenbach said.

Plans were being developed to construct a bypass around the damaged pipe. There was no estimate of when repairs would be completed.

The pipeline transports crude oil from the San Joaquin Valley to Los Angeles-area refineries. The rupture was not expected to immediately affect supply because of previous storage, Diefenbach said.

"We can use alternate pipelines for a few more days. Right now we don't see any impact, but we would get concerned in a few days," he said.

Caltrans closed one lane of Interstate 5 in each direction and the on- and off-ramps near the lake to provide a staging area for cleanup crews. The emergency closures were expected to last for seven to 10 days, Caltrans officials said.

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