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Donna speaks about being a committed lesbian activist, what motivates her, the recent Measure 9 campaign and being executive director of LCP

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Oil spill exaggerated, says Exxon



ATLANTA (AP) — Exxon Corp. claimed Wednesday that predictions of long-term damage from the Valdez oil spill are being grossly exaggerated because of laboratory errors

and a failure to recognize other sources of oil in Alaska's Prince William Sound.

The government said the oil giant's claims are "viable" and that it will recheck the data.

"Some of what they say may very well be true," said Dave Kennedy of the Seattle office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which handled the government's studies of the spill.

"But I'm not sure that in the long run it really changes all that much. The fact remains they still spilled 11 million gallons of oil that had a tremendous impact at the time."

The 1989 tanker accident killed unknown numbers of wildlife, including possibly a third of the Sound's sea otter population. Some scientists say the Sound needs decades to recover and that some wildlife may still be poisoned there.

Exxon didn't dispute the spill's immediate impact. But Wednesday the company released data backing its claims that those long-term predictions are exaggerated.

"We don't want to belittle it," said Exxon scientist Dr. Hans O. Jahns. "But we're all going to be living with oil production, and it doesn't serve anybody well to have an exaggerated perception of what an oil spill can do."

Exxon will present 25 studies at a science conference in Atlanta in two weeks, where other scientists will debate the findings.

An overview of the tests shows Exxon used chemical fingerprinting to distinguish the Valdez crude from other hydrocarbons in the Sound.

Exxon contends scientists who didn't use that technique labeled even naturally occurring hydrocarbons as Valdez oil. Exxon found oil from natural seeps upstream and from diesel fuel used by

'The fact remains they still spilled 11 million gallons of oil that had a tremendous impact at the time.'

— Dave Kennedy,
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration

boats in the Sound that it contended was misidentified.

Valdez crude was present after the spill but decreased over time, Jahns said.

Exxon also claimed high levels of laboratory contamination misled scientists.

The government found flaws in its database as early as 1990, said Bruce Wright of Juneau, project manager for NOAA's oil spill assessment office.

It noticed a problem when samples from the same site showed widely varying amounts of oil and when oil was reported in sites where no contamination was expected.

"There was an extraneous source of oil in the samples," Wright said. "I am not sure how this could have happened."

But suspect data was discarded, he added.

And Bob Spies, a California scientist who is advising Alaskan officials about spending the \$900 million Exxon paid for restoration, said other studies that reached the same conclusions should offset doubt about NOAA's database.

Projections on otter recovery, for example, were based on tracking the survivors. "Whether or not a blood sample was tainted in the lab is a very small part of that," he said.

Texas A&M University, which did most of the lab testing for NOAA, already checked its results and found no contamination, said chief chemist Mahlon C. Kennicutt II.

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Parents sue after E. coli infects child

SEATTLE (AP) — The parents of a 7-year-old girl stricken in January's food-poisoning outbreak have filed a federal lawsuit against the Jack in the Box restaurant chain.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court on Tuesday by the parents of Lindsey Hicks of Spanaway. Lindsey was hospitalized more than three weeks after eating a Jack in the Box hamburger Jan. 7, said Karen Balluff, the attorney representing the family.

The suit seeks unspecified damages from Jack in the Box, which is owned by San Diego-based Foodmaker Inc., and Foodmaker's former meat supplier, The Vons Cos.

Two toddlers died and hundreds of Washington residents fell ill in January and February in an outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 bacterium linked to undercooked and contaminated hamburgers at Jack in the Box restaurants. A third death from E. coli also occurred in that time, but has not been positively linked to Jack in the Box.

More than a dozen lawsuits have been filed in Washington against Jack in the Box and Foodmaker. Jack in the Box has offered to pay the medical costs of those who became sick from tainted hamburger.

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