

SPILL RESPONSE MANAGEMENT: WILDLIFE REHABILITATION



Successful rehabilitation of oiled wildlife requires significant funding, coordinated response plans, sophisticated logistical planning, dedicated facilities and highly-trained personnel, as well as the need to be constantly up-to-date on practices and supplies.

IF YOU DISCOVER OILED WILDLIFE

Wildlife rehabilitation is a painstaking, stressful and slow process, and should be exclusively managed by wildlife professionals and highly-trained staff. The BCSPCA warns untrained persons to never approach, touch or treat a wild animal impacted by oil. Oiled wildlife are under extreme stress and could be very defensive. This could result in bodily harm to a person who attempts to handle an animal as well as further stress and injury to the struggling animal.

The BCSPCA asks members of the public to immediately contact the professional wildlife rehabilitators that are involved in the spill response to report animals in distress. Important information to include is location, species (if known), condition and behaviour.

If you are interested in learning to care for oiled wildlife, first responder training courses are offered by the [Oiled Wildlife Society of BC](#). In the event of a large spill, if support from the public is required, those with current wildlife rehabilitation experience could be recruited into the response.

WHAT TO WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS DO?

Wildlife rehabilitation is a developing discipline that draws on a growing body of knowledge from veterinary medicine, wildlife biology, conservation, ecology, wildlife nutrition and physiology, animal welfare, anthropology, geography and epidemiology.

Wildlife professionals provide expert species-specific care and oversight to oiled and injured animals, performing diagnostic tests, creating treatment plans and performing basic medical care with the goal of returning the animal to full physiological and behavioral functionality for release back into the wild. These first responders are quickly activated in a spill response to locate and begin treatment of oiled wildlife as quickly as possible, and to ensure appropriate, safe and high-quality care.

THE STAGES OF WILDLIFE RECOVERY

The length of time it takes to rehabilitate oiled wildlife varies depending on the species and the condition the animal is in. For example, birds are typically in care for two weeks before being released back into their natural habitats.

There are six stages of recovering and rehabilitating oiled wildlife.

STAGE 1: Initial Impact Assessment

Determine wildlife response needs based on:

- Quantity, type, fate and behaviour of spilled product
- Oil infiltration of area
- Habitat type and usage
- Location, species, density of wildlife in the affected area
- Accessibility to wildlife and access points to oiled areas
- Hazards and controls
- Communication ability of search and rescue personnel

STAGE 2: Search and Collection

Capture oiled wildlife. Methods could include spot lighting, noose traps, mist nets, cannon nets and boat operations. Properly distribute personnel for most effective search and rescue efforts.

STAGE 3: Deterrence

Implement techniques to prevent impact on wildlife.

Techniques include:

- Dispersing wildlife into appropriate clean habitat
- Dispersing the entire area of concern as continuously as possible
- Utilizing a variety of devices to avoid habituation
- Removing all vegetation, sources of cover, possible nesting areas, food sources and other attractants

STAGE 4: Field Stabilization

Address life threatening medical conditions by:

- Providing thermoregulatory support
- Removing gross contaminants
- Providing fluid therapy if transport time exceeds two hours
- Placing in appropriate transport container

STAGE 5: Transport

Relocate wildlife to primary care facility, ensuring appropriate container and transport conditions are met (size, ventilation, minimal stressors, temperature, ability to consistently monitor).

STAGE 6: Rehabilitation and Recovery

This stage is focused on animal care operations, including:

- Processing of evidence
- Intake of wildlife: medical assessment, blood sampling, thermoregulatory assistance, developing treatment plan or triage
- Stabilization: wash evaluation, nutrition and fluid administration, vitamin therapy, medical treatment to begin reversal effects of oil
- Cleaning: washing, rinsing, drying
- Conditioning: pre-release rehabilitation, including acclimatizing, regaining waterproofing (birds), rebuilding fitness/endurance, nutritional and medical support
- Release: determined based on several criteria, including weight, lung condition, physical evaluation, behaviour, waterproofing (birds), blood values

A NOTE ON WASHING

An oiled animal is already highly stressed and thus is not washed immediately. The specialized process of removing contaminants involves procedures that amplify this stress for an animal. It is important to carefully assess the animal's condition and be certain they are medically prepared to undergo this process without suffering additional harm. This stage could include rehydration, normalization of temperature and the monitoring of other physical indicators including weight, behaviour, temperament and blood values. If the animal does not meet certain minimum medical criteria, it may not be washed.



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Vancouver Island | Duncan: 250-746-9443
North Coast | Prince Rupert: 250-624-5666

Sources

BC SPCA | spca.bc.ca
FOCUS Wildlife | focuswildlife.org
Oiled Wildlife Society of BC | oiledwildlifesociety.com