

Ottawa Lake, Michigan Diesel Spill Response
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated April 8, 2024

Q: Has the spill been contained?

A: Yes. The line that contained the leak was shut down on March 26. The on-site sewer system has been capped to stop flow off-site. There is no continuing release.

Q: Was the leak coming from an underground storage tank?

A: No, the leak came from a four-inch supply line. That line was shut off upon discovery of the leak and a vacuum truck was set up to remove the product immediately after leaving the pipe. The volume collected from this location is included in the total number of gallons of pure product reported out daily.

Q: Is there still oil migrating to the south of the site in North Tenmile Creek?

A: Two underflow dams have been installed in North Tenmile Creek at the outfall behind the Sunoco gas station on US 223 and near Erie Road to prevent any heavy contamination from moving downstream. These locations will stop the flow of additional oily sheen downstream as the contaminated sediments in North Tenmile Creek are removed. Since EPA arrived on scene, booms have been installed in several locations downstream of these dams to contain any oil sheens that were present prior to the dam installations. These booms are maintained on a regular basis and any oil buildup is removed by a contractor with EPA and EGLE oversight.

Q: Who is overseeing the cleanup of the on-site contamination?

A: EPA and EGLE are on site daily to review plans and ensure that the cleanup is progressing in a safe and orderly fashion.

Q: How long will it take to finish the cleanup?

A: EPA and EGLE are working with Pilot to clean up all off-site contamination as safely and efficiently as possible. A plan for the on-site work is currently under development.

Q: How will the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit work for the water treated and discharged on-site?

A: The NPDES permit is overseen by EGLE. The on-site requirements will include a weather analysis to ensure drainage ditches will not reach flood capacity, laboratory analysis of the treated water prior to discharge, coordination with the neighbors, and regular assessments of the discharge line throughout the day.

Q: What is karst geology?

A: Karst is a type of landscape that occurs in areas where soluble rock types such as limestone and dolomite are found in the bedrock. Over time as water travels underground, these rock types dissolve

which leads to the formation of cracks, fractures, and holes. Some characteristic features of karst landscapes include sinkholes, sinking streams, caves, and springs.

Karst formations can be found in Monroe County. EPA and EGLE have been working with the MCHD and MDHHS to evaluate whether this could be a potential pathway for contaminants, but analytical results to date have not indicated any impact to groundwater as a result of the spill. If residents nearby North Tenmile Creek have springs on their property and notice odors, sheens, or other evidence of oil, please contact EPA or EGLE so that the potential for underground migration can be investigated immediately.

Q: I can see a brown buildup in some areas of the creek, is that oil?

A: Containment measures such as containment booms and underflow dams have been installed on North Tenmile Creek to prevent downstream migration of any sheens released by cleanup activities. While the purpose of these booms is to capture any oil on the surface of the water, other materials such as pollen, algae, sediments, and debris can also collect in front of them over time. Here's an example.



Buildup of natural materials in North Tenmile Creek on April 6, 2024

One thing that can distinguish the two is that absorbent booms and pads are oleophilic meaning that while they absorb oil and hydrocarbons, they repel water and other materials. If you see buildup in front of a booming location and it is not being absorbed by the pads, it may not be oil. EPA is monitoring the two underflow dams and six containment boom locations on North Tenmile Creek several times per day. If a resident believes they see or smell oil in North Tenmile Creek outside of the work area, please contact EPA or EGLE.

Q: What kind of cleanup is being done on-site?

A: EPA is working with Pilot to ensure all on-site contamination from the spill is cleaned up thoroughly and safely. A plan has been developed to determine the extent of the underground contamination for removal. Under EPA and EGLE oversight, Pilot has already started to perform a full subsurface investigation to determine the extent of contamination.

Q: How long will the work take to complete both on-site and in North Tenmile Creek?

A: The off-site work in North Tenmile Creek should be completed within a couple weeks. Permits are being secured to ensure work does not impact any habitat for endangered/protected species and that the waterway will provide the correct flow for future storm events. The preparation for this work has not been held up by the permit process and work is anticipated to begin this week.

The duration of the on-site work will be determined by the cleanup plan proposed by Pilot. If the company chooses to remediate as much on-site contamination as possible, the long-term remediation plan and oversight by EPA and/or EGLE will have an extended period of time (months to years). If Pilot chooses to remove all contamination (including tanks, lines, and subsurface utilities), the remediation plan and oversight by EPA and EGLE will be much shorter (weeks to months). EPA and EGLE are in discussions with Pilot and updates will be made available once there is new information.