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Red Sea Oil Spill Not Caused By Offshore Rigs, Egypt's Oil Ministry Says

By Daniel Williams and Alaa Shahine - Jun 24, 2010

The Egyptian [Oil Ministry](#) said crude oil that washed ashore at a major Red Sea beach resort area was leaked by a passing tanker or may have seeped from the ground due to a heat wave, but was not from any of its rigs.

The ministry's report, issued today, said that all offshore oil platforms in the Red Sea are "sound," according to the state-run [Middle East News Agency](#). Oil from the rigs was compared with samples from the sea but the investigators "cannot say for sure" whether the samples matched.

"A rise in temperature during that period led to a shift" that turned "ancient deposits of oil on some islands to a semi-liquid state," which then flowed into the sea, according to the official account. Ballast from a tanker may have contributed to the spill, the ministry said.

The ministry commissioned the report last weekend to investigate the source of an oil spill that began washing ashore along the Hurghada resort area on June 17. The oil stained miles of the coast.

Egypt has been developing its eastern coastline to encourage tourism, which is the country's biggest foreign exchange earner. The Red Sea and nearby Gulf of Suez is also Egypt's main oil-producing area, with more than 180 offshore rigs operating there, according to the ministry.

Transparency

Amr Ali, managing director of the [Hurghada Environmental and Conservation Association](#), said the notion that an oil tanker or high atmospheric temperatures caused the spill was hard to digest. "This was not some sort of passing dump of oil, much less an act of God," he said. "Any schoolchild can see that. They just don't want to take responsibility. There's zero transparency in Egypt."

More than 20 kilometers (12 miles) of coastline, from El-Gouna in the north to Sahi Hashish in the south, had been polluted by the oil, Al Masry Al Youm newspaper reported on June 19. Only 30 barrels of crude washed ashore near the resort of Hurghada, according to the ministry.

Egypt's Oil Ministry said on June 22 that by reducing the number of oil rigs in the Gulf of Suez it might be able to monitor those that remain more effectively. Oil Minister [Sameh Fahmy](#) has called for the establishment of a fund to fight pollution, the ministry said.

Total Egyptian oil output averaged 742,000 barrels a day in 2009, compared with a peak of 941,000 barrels a day at the end of 1993, according to the BP Annual Statistical Review of World Energy.

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