

# Egypt oil spill threatens Red Sea marine life

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CAIRO — An oil spill off the Egyptian Red Sea coast of Hurghada threatening to damage marine life in the area has prompted environmental agencies to demand tighter regulation of offshore oil platforms.

Large quantities of oil have appeared in recent days around the resorts of Hurghada which draw millions of tourists who come to dive or snorkle, according to the Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Agency.

"It started four or five days ago and the companies responsible didn't notify anyone. It is catastrophic," HEPCA Managing Director Amr Ali told AFP.

The spill was caused by leakage from an offshore oil platform north of Hurghada and has polluted protected areas and showed up on tourist beach resorts.

"The companies have said they will pay damages, but it is the environmental damage that we are concerned about," Ali said, declining to name the companies for legal reasons.

"We will take all measures, including legal, to make sure this does not happen again," he said.

HEPCA's warning comes amid ongoing efforts to contain the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico which has already damaged fragile ecosystems along the US south coast and halted the region's multi-billion-dollar fishing industry.

HEPCA, a non-governmental organisation based in Hurghada, has been working for the protection of natural resources in the Red Sea.

Egypt's environment and tourism ministries said the oil spill was contained and that measures were being taken to "deal with the pollution caused by the spill," the official MENA news agency reported.

Authorities protective of the lucrative tourism industry were eager to resolve the matter quickly. Both the Environment Minister Maged George and Petroleum Minister Sameh Fahmy visited the area of the spill on Saturday.

But HEPCA says it was too little too late.

"Visits won't help. We would like to see a clearer plan of action on the ground," Ali said.

"We would also like to see more stringent standards imposed on these offshore platforms to ensure natural areas are protected," he said.