

Oil-slicked runoff raises fears for Peninsula stream



Ian Bruce of the Peninsula Streams Society checks oil spill seeping into a drain that runs into Sandhill Creek, the only salmon stream on Saanich Peninsula. White absorbent pads were being used to mop up the spill Thursday. *Darren Stone/TC*

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The only salmon-bearing stream left on the Saanich Peninsula was threatened Thursday by pollution observers said came from a Central Saanich scrap-metal yard off Keating Cross Road.

Rain runoff flushed oil and diesel from Hi-Rise Salvage, 3-6785 Veyaness Rd., into an adjacent parking lot, where it flowed into a storm drain that empties into Sand Hill Creek.

Municipal public works staff placed white absorbent pads to mop up the spill, but biologist Ian Bruce, of the Peninsula Streams Society, complained that Central Saanich staff are powerless to deal with polluters. And no federal or provincial officials responded in person to his calls about the spill, he said.

"It's got to be the Exxon Valdez before they respond," said Bruce, referring to the oil tanker spill off the Alaska coast in 1989.

The stream restoration expert said he followed the latest provincial "one-stop" solution for reporting environmental problems by calling a toll-free number to the Provincial Emergency Program.

Bruce said that for five hours he watched oily water flowing off the Hi-Rise Salvage property, but that no one from the province had returned his call. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans also had no one available to monitor the situation.

However, Alex Grant, a spill-response

officer from the Environment Ministry, said he had contacted Central Saanich officials after receiving information about Bruce's call to PEP late in the morning. Grant said he left messages for Bruce that were not returned.

Based in Nanaimo, Grant is one of just two spill officers for Vancouver Island. He said the ministry tries to work with municipalities to deal with an average of 800 spills reported each year on the Island.

The ministry can respond to about only five per cent of cases in person, Grant said. In this case, the ministry plans to schedule a meeting with municipal staff and the owner of Hi-Rise Salvage to inspect the property and discuss its operations.

Ken Beliveau, owner of Hi-Rise Salvage, was out of town and could not be contacted. No one else was available from the company to comment.

Bruce fears the damage may have been done to the creek that flows east into the Tsawout reserve.

Saanich Coun. Zeb King, who also saw the spill, shared concerns about the lack of response from senior government. "I guess with all the slashing and gutting going on, there's no one available," he said.

King said the incident highlights the need for Central Saanich to adopt a stormwater bylaw.

The Capital Regional District has developed a model bylaw, adopted by the City of Victoria, that allows municipal staff to issue tickets to businesses or individuals responsible for polluting storm drains.