

**Thursday, December 6, 2007 - Cambridge, England**

**The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) Establishes an Action Group on Antarctic Fuel Spills in the Aftermath of the MV Explorer Incident**

The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) is closely following the aftermath of the collision of a tourist ship (MV Explorer) with ice in Antarctic waters. Prompt action helped avoid the loss of life, however, thousands of liters of fuel remain in the sunken vessel and it has been reported that fuel is leaking into the sea. Whether or not these releases will cause ecological damage is as yet unknown. Other contaminants typically found on ships may be released to the environment as well. The oil slick is presently in an area of loose pack ice and some 2500 birds, mostly penguins, have been observed in the vicinity. The greatest impacts are likely to occur if the fuel strands on shores where animals reside, but open-water fuel slicks can affect plankton such as krill and their predators including whales, penguins and seals.

As one of the organizations responsible for providing scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty parties, SCAR has special concerns about human impacts on the integrity of the Antarctic environment. Dr. Chris Rapley, President of SCAR, said "It is our responsibility to bring to bear the best scientific advice we can to protect and preserve the region for today and for future generations...". SCAR has established an "Action Group on Antarctic Fuel Spills" of oceanographers, ecologists and other specialists to respond to requests from the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat and/or Antarctic Treaty Parties for assistance or advice. SCAR has also contacted the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) to coordinate advice on potential response scenarios. Dr. Mahlon C. Kennicutt II, Vice President of SCAR for Scientific Affairs, warns that "...our ability to respond effectively to oil spills in polar climates, especially ice-infested waters, is limited despite years of research in the Arctic...". SCAR convenes Action Groups to rapidly assemble the expertise needed to address specific issues in a timely manner, in this case, the fate and effects of fuel releases to the sea.

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**Background:**

SCAR, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, is the main body for the international coordination of scientific research in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Formed in February 1958 to continue coordination begun during the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58, it is an interdisciplinary committee of the International Council for Science (ICSU). The SCAR Secretariat is based at the Scott Polar research Institute in Cambridge, UK. For further details see [www.scar.org](http://www.scar.org).