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OOPS! THE HISTORY OF SPILLS IN THE HISTORY OF OIL

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Human history has been inextricably intertwined with oil, with early written accounts found in the Bible and historical records of ancient Greece making frequent references to petroleum products. Recent archeological work in Syria has documented one of the earliest uses of such material in fixing handles onto Paleolithic flint tools, dating to 40,000 BC. Historical references to what we, in a modern context, refer to as *oil spills*, however, are nearly nonexistent prior to the last half of the 20th century. This fact may be attributed to the relatively recent emergence of environmental concern and a better understanding of the fate and effects of oil in the natural environment.

The Emergency Response Division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (ERD/NOAA) provides scientific support to the US Coast Guard and other agencies during spills of oil and hazardous chemicals. Fundamental to that science is knowledge and understanding of the long-term effects of spilled oil in the environment. NOAA/ERD has monitored many spills over the years to provide guidance for future incidents.

But we know that other spills have occurred in history, and some of these releases have been very large. What might they tell us about even longer-term effects and trends? These old events may provide a historical context by which we can assess both the scales and durations of recent oil spills.

NOAA is investigating the history of oil spills in the US and around the world. While the professional and historical literature (and inevitably, the internet) are filled with direct accounts of and allusions to spills, it is our hope that members of the Petroleum History Institute may offer new insights and contacts that can provide a more complete and robust record. This presentation will serve to introduce the spill history proj-gev"cpf "uggmu"cf f k\kqpcn"uqwtegu"qh"kphqto cvkqp"kp"yj ku"cwf k/gpeg"qh"ur gekcnkuvu"y kj kp"yj g"r gvtqngwo "kpf wuvt{0"