

SOUTHERN CAPE FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION ASSIST WITH KIANI SATU OIL SPILL

In the early hours of Thursday, the 8th of August, the Kiani Satu ran aground west of the Goukamma River Estuary near Buffalo Bay, Knysna. Carrying 330 tons of heavy fuel oil and 15 000 tons of rice, the vessel suffered damage to the oil tank and started leaking.

During the following days, an estimated 20 organisations including Eden Disaster Management, Knysna Municipality, SANparks, Cape Nature, SANCOP, etc. came together in Buffalo Bay to form a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) to deal with the disaster. Part of the JOC is the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA), a non-profit organisation that deals with veld and forest fires and promotes integrated fire management, which consists of prevention, detection, suppression, awareness and damage rehabilitation.

The SCFPA was contacted a few days after the vessel stranded through Paul Gerber, chairman of the organisation. Help was needed with the oil spill clean-up operation of the beach and the SCFPA was approached due to the Working on Fire (WoF) fire fighters crews they have in their command. As well as their substantial work force, the SCFPA also has a great deal of experience in the incident command system.

WoF fire fighters are young men and women recruited from marginalised communities and are trained in fire prevention, suppression, fire education and awareness. They are stationed at bases and form veld and forest fire fighting ground crews to help stop the scourge of wildfires.

On the 13th of August, three of the SCFPAs' WoF crews, Goudveld, Craggs and Riversdale, set up base in Buffalo Bay Caravan Park. In total, 90 fire fighters and 8 SCFPA personnel could assist with the operation as well as crowd control and security of the area.

The WoF fire fighters received specialized training to work with the contaminated material along with personal protective equipment for their safety. The clean-up started on Thursday, the 15th of August at the Goukamma River Estuary. At this time the vessel were still stranded and full-scale operation could not begin until it was moved 10 nautical miles (18.52km) from the coast.

On the morning of Saturday the 17th of August the vessel was tugged out to sea. It was decided that the Riversdale and Craggs WoF teams would be sent home to rest while the Goudveld crew continue with crowd control and security.

The following Monday an assessment was done to determine the damage caused by the oil spill and how the clean-up operations would commence. The investigation showed that the Sundays' rough and high seas naturally cleaned most of the beach of the Goukamma Nature Reserve and Marine Protected Area and that it need only a small amount of manual cleaning.

Due to the natural cleaning process of the sea, the incident command decided that three WoF crews would be adequate to carry on with the clean-up operation with a total of 40 fire fighters. A full-scale clean-up operation of the oil spill started on Tuesday the 20th of August by the Goudveld and Craggs fire fighters and will proceed for approximately 2 to 4 weeks.

This operation was and still is a good exercise for the SCFPA personnel and teams to strengthen their incident management capabilities. The Working on Fire teams also gained some experience and training in a different field of work, broadening their knowledge and skills base.