

Beirut oil slick: Israeli bombing has triggered Mediterranean's worst ever environmental catastrophe

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Beirut oil slick devastates the Mediterranean

By Anne Penketh

The Israeli bombing of a Lebanese power plant has triggered the Mediterranean's worst ever environmental catastrophe, with up to 30,000 tons of heavy fuel oil spewing out into the sea and the sludge-covered bodies of dead fish littering the once pristine beaches.

The marine damage in the Mediterranean, according to a spokeswoman for a UN agency that hopes to help clean up the mess once the bombing of Lebanon stops, could last for "up to a century".

Fuel tanks at the power plant at Jieh, located on the coastline 19 miles south of Beirut, have been on fire since the facility was hit on 13 July by Israeli warplanes. Two days later it was hit again. The fuel that did not catch fire spilled into the sea, causing a huge slick which has spread 50 miles up the coast of Lebanon and six miles along the coastline of neighbouring Syria. Many Lebanese accuse Israel of deliberately trying to sabotage the economy and the country's fragile tourist industry. Yassin Jaber, a prominent Lebanese MP who is a former minister, yesterday said: "This is part of a sequence of the war of envy and hatred. Why hit the factories, destroying its economic backbone? There's no other explanation."

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