

activity poses a potential pollution hazard to the coastal waters around the island. Unless preventive measures are undertaken and a corrective emergency plan is developed, we are liable to experience another disaster of even larger magnitude than the *Ocean Eagle*.

Puerto Rico, just like other similar industrial communities on the coasts of the United States, share identical pollution dangers which in this age of technological advances are constantly increased by the construction of jumbo-size tankers and the increment in the volume of the petroleum traffic.

As in the case of the *Torrey Canyon* disaster last year, we have acquired some knowledge of how to deal with an emergency of this nature. The purpose of this report is to summarize our experience and respectfully suggest some measures which should be undertaken to prevent and correct the consequences of similar accidents in the future.

Description of the accident

The *Ocean Eagle*, a fifteen year old tanker registered under the Liberian flag, was owned by the Northland Shipping Trading Company of New York. The 12,065 ton tanker departed from Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela bound for San Juan, Puerto Rico with a reported cargo of 5.7 million gallons (US) of petroleum crude to be delivered to the Caribbean Gulf Refining Corp. of Cataño, Puerto Rico.

Hazardous climatologic conditions existed in the Atlantic Ocean near the northern coast of Puerto Rico from the second to the fourth of March, 1968. Swells of 4 to 15 feet high were reported in this area approaching from the northwest, while mild winds from a northeasterly direction were recorded in San Juan.

Under these unfavorable conditions in the dawn of March 3rd, 1968 the *Ocean Eagle* approached the 500 foot-wide entrance channel to the San Juan Harbor. According to the testimony of the ship's captain, the *Ocean Eagle* scraped its bottom several times about 7:00 a.m. in a few minutes after the port pilot had boarded the vessel. Immediately the crew observed steam, and petroleum leaking out through the sides of the ship and the order to abandon ship was given. Most of the 35 members of the crew abandoned the ship within an hour of the accident. They were rescued by the Puerto Rico Lighterage Company without loss of life or limb.

The *Ocean Eagle* split in two parts moments later. The bow section was aground at a distance of approximately 300 yards north of the harbor's entrance and the stern drifted into the channel impeding the access to the San Juan Harbor. Simultaneously, the petroleum leaking from the ship wreck began to spread into the San Juan Bay and along the northern shore of the city.

The unusual weather conditions that prevailed until March 4th, were responsible for the easterly drift of the oil slicks. After the swells had dissipated, the northeasterly Trade Winds gained strength and generated the wave action that moved some of the oil slicks back towards the west. In the meantime, the Golden Coast of San Juan, where most of the luxury hotels are located, was intensely contaminated by the petroleum. The damage was affecting the marine traffic, the commerce, the oil industry, the tourism, the flora, the fauna, and the esthetics of the city.

Description of the Operations

President Lyndon B. Johnson, who was in a weekend vacation at Ramey Air Force Base in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, upon being informed of the *Ocean Eagle* accident ordered all federal agencies concerned to assist the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in the emergency operations by all possible means.

The Acting Governor of Puerto Rico, the Honorable Guillermo Irizarry, immediately met with all the federal and commonwealth agencies directly involved with the accident to organize, plan, and coordinate all efforts to cope with the emergency. Responsibilities for the different operations were assigned at this meeting. These assignments were based on the individual duties, functions, and experiences of the agencies and the equipment and facilities available.

During the afternoon of March 3rd, the Acting Governor and the Secretary of Public Works made an aerial reconnaissance of the affected area to determine the extent of the damages. The largest concentration of petroleum was flowing into the San Juan Harbor and the oil slicks extended about three miles north