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Molasses Spill in Hawaii More Lethal to Fish Than Oil

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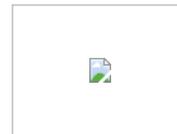
By [LESLIE SINCLAIR](#)

We're heard about the dangers of oil spills on marine life, but this week, Hawaii's coast has been devastated by a surprisingly dangerous substance. On Monday, a brown plume was spotted seeping into Honolulu Harbor and Keehi Lagoon after a ship moseyed out to sea. That would be 1,400 tons of sticky molasses spilled by Matson Inc. from a pipe used to load the goo onto the ship. Best known for its starring role in bran muffins and gingerbread, molasses unfortunately, is [lethal to fish](#).

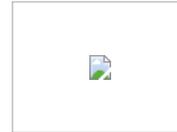
Unlike oil, which is cleaned by skimming it from the surface of the water, molasses quickly disperses to the deepest points, suffocating fish at depth. Aside from removing dead fish, the remedial plan is to do nothing. The plume is expected to be visible for weeks as tides and currents naturally flush the area. So far, crews have collected about 2,000 marine casualties and are expecting more in the coming days as a result of the spill.

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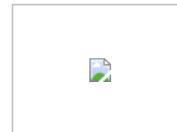
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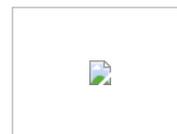
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"While molasses is not harmful to the public directly," the State Department of Health said, "the substance is polluting the water, causing fish to die and could lead to an increase in predator species." In other words, stay out of the water. [We're talking sharks](#), barracudas and eels, here.

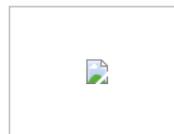
Oddly enough, this isn't the first time we've seen the tyranny of this seemingly innocuous substance. On January 15, 1919 a massive storage tank ruptured in Boston sending a 4.5 metre high wave of molasses ripping down Commercial Street at 56 kilometres an hour. According to the Boston Globe, people "were picked up by a rush of air and hurled many feet." Girders on an elevated train track were damaged, and houses crushed by the surge. All told 21 people were killed and 150 injured in the disaster.

Beyond the devastation to Hawaii's marine life, the nutrient-laden liquid – just one tablespoon provides about 20% of the recommended daily value of calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron – could cause unusual growth in algae, stimulate an increase in harmful bacteria and trigger other environmental issues. Beware molasses! It doesn't strike often but when it does, it goes straight for the kill. Experts say it could take up to 2 years for the area to recover.

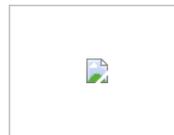
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