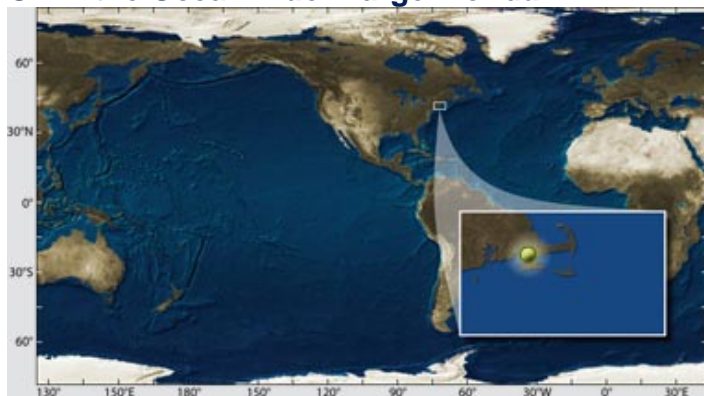


## Oil in the Ocean: Fuel Barge *Florida*



**Location:** Buzzards Bay, off West Falmouth, Mass.

**Date:** September 16, 1969

Lat./Long.: 41°35'57.60"N, 70°41'47.88"W

Material spilled: No. 2 fuel oil

Amount spilled: 189,000 gallons

Spill extent: \*\*

When the fuel barge *Florida* struck a reef in September 1969 it spilled about 4,000 barrels of No. 2 home heating oil into the coastal waters of Buzzards Bay. The spill was small by many standards and received very little media attention, but four decades later, hydrocarbons remain buried in marsh sediments and continue to influence the health and function of physical, chemical, and biological processes there. Work to study the spill has also had a profound effect on scientific understanding of how oil affects the ocean that continues to be felt today.

The spill heavily oiled one small cove in West Falmouth, Mass., near Woods Hole and the oceanographers at WHOI. That cove, Wild Harbor, has become the focus of more than 40 years of scientific research into the physical, chemical, and biological impacts of oil spills on coastal and near-shore ecosystems. Those efforts represent the first comprehensive, quantitative, and peer-reviewed studies into how oil affects the marine environment, including the transport and persistence of contaminants, the long-term health of plant and animal communities, and the very shape of an oiled coastline decades after a spill.

Scientists from WHOI and elsewhere continue to visit Wild Harbor to look for clues to how other oil spills might play out in the environment over years to come.



[Enlarge Image](#)

United States Coast Guard officers talking with barge *Florida*. (Photo courtesy WHOI Archives)

### Publications

Culbertson, JB, I Valiela, M Pickart, EE Peacock, and CM Reddy, "Long-term consequences of residual petroleum on salt marsh grass," *Journal of Applied Ecology* 45(2008): 1284-1292.

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Sanders, HL, "Florida oil spill impact on Buzzards Bay benthic fauna," *Journal of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada* 35(1978): 717-730.

## From *Oceanus Magazine*



April 23, 2007

### [Still Toxic After All These Years](#)

Does oil spilled in 1969 still have impacts on wildlife? Ask a fiddler crab.

Source: *Oceanus Magazine*

October 13, 2004



### [Oil in Our Coastal Back Yard](#)

An oil spill on WHOI's shores set the stage for advances in the science of cleaning up

Source: *Oceanus Magazine*

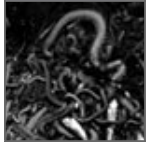
### [A Local Spill Revisited](#)



By John Teal, *Oceanus* magazine, 1993

(pdf format)

### [Local Spill](#)



By George Hampson and Howard Sanders, *Oceanus* magazine, 1969

(pdf format)

## Multimedia



### [Science in a Time of Crisis, Chapter 1: Oil Spill Pioneers](#)

WHOI's Response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

### [Lessons from an Old Oil Spill](#)



From *The New York Times*

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