



Tourism economic impacts

Tourists' perceptions of pollution can lead to loss of business opportunities and subsequent financial implications [1]. In general, people consider pollutants offensive because they pose a threat to health or induce a feeling of discomfort. People prefer to visit clean beaches free of contaminants and they may avoid certain places if they hear of or find their appearance unacceptable [2]. Studies have found that oil on beaches was the second

Average rank position of pollution type [3]	
1 most offensive, 8 least offensive	
Sewage debris	1.7
Oil (on beach)	3.5
Oil (in the sea)	4.0
Floating Debris	4.9
Foam/Scum	5.0

most offensive pollutant [see table]; and that sand and water quality to be the most important aspect of a beach to visitors [2, 3]. Coastal communities that rely heavily on tourism for their livelihood can have their income severely depleted by an oil spill.

Lost tourism revenues: *T/B Bouchard-120*

On April 27th, 2003, the tank barge *Bouchard-120* grounded on a reef and released 98,000 gallons of oil into Buzzards Bay, MA. Tourism is amongst the most important sectors around the bay and attracts thousands of tourists from Massachusetts and neighboring states. Summer rental is an important business. The oiling of the beach was detrimental to summer rentals. In Mattapoisett, oceanfront cottage rental varies between \$1,300 and \$2,500 per week [2009 rental rates]. "Near to the beach" property rental ranges from \$800 to \$1,400 per week.



Buzzards Bay tourism season, 2003
Cartoon: Dave Granlund

According to a lawsuit, some property owners had to reduce the rental price because the beach had been contaminated, resulting in losses between 11% and 43% of the rental revenue that summer [7]. The oil spill was given national media coverage. Tourists perceived the beaches as contaminated, even though they had been cleaned up. The perception of pollution strongly shapes beach users' and tourists' decisions about where to vacation.

The closure of shellfish beds for a period of time along with the visibility of oil on rocks, made people worried about consuming seafood [8]. Because of shellfish bed closures and concerns about health risks people were not pulling recreational permits for shellfishing, which had financial implications for towns. After the spill some people turned in their recreational shellfishing licenses and the towns had to refund the money.

Impacts

- Loss of revenue at primary tourist businesses
- Business failures
- Reduced employment opportunities
- Loss of tax revenue for communities
- Declined usage fees for public utilities
- Reputation of region as undesirable destination
- Personal bankruptcies
- Increased debt load
- Loss of revenue at secondary firms



Human Dimensions Impacts of Oil Spills

High costs of a tourism marketing campaign: *M/V Pacific Adventurer*

The disaster unfolded on March 11, 2009 when the *MV Pacific Adventurer*, caught in a tropical cyclone, steered straight into unruly seas. 31 containers of ammonium nitrate fell from the deck and punctured the hull of the vessel. Subsequently about 80 000 gallons of fuel and chemical were spilled into the sea. The oil washed ashore on 37 miles of beaches of southeastern Queensland, Australia. The affected zone covered Moreton Island, and the southern tip of Bribie Island, to Point Arkwright, south of Coolum Beach on the Sunshine Coast [4]. The strip includes popular tourist swimming spots and prime shorebird habitat.

The economy of Queensland relies on tourism attracting about 10 million visitors per year [5].

Easter holiday in mid-April is a particularly lucrative period for local businesses.

Earlier that year, Queensland government spent \$1.3 million on a tourism marketing campaign to promote the region's pristine beaches. After the spill, the government announced an extra \$750,000 to mitigate tourism losses. Despite the marketing campaign, tourists cancelled bookings and the numbers of visitor slumped after seeing images of polluted shores shown around the world. That year the number of domestic visitors declined by 4% and international visitors by 6% when compared to the previous year [5].



Moreton Island, Queensland, Australia

Photo: Getty Images / Brisbane Times

On Moreton Island, the spills considerably lessened the number of visitors despite the marketing effort. Many tour operators were forced to close for four weeks after the disaster. The family-run Koorinal General Store reduced its staff as it struggled to catch up after the low season. One shop owner who lost thousands of dollars said "business was as worse as beach erosion and the impact of the spill continued to decimate tourist numbers"[6]. The Easter holiday season was qualified as disastrous. Moreton Island was still recovering more than six months after the environmental disaster. Tourism Queensland chief executive Anthony Hayes said tourism businesses losses alone could have been more than \$1 million had the government not implemented an aggressive marketing campaign [4].

References

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