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**Press Release**

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### **Oil Spill in Penang: One Major Disaster and Common Occurrences Too**

The recent major oil spill in Penang reported to have polluted a 5km coastline on the island stretching from Swettenham Pier to Gurney Drive is a major concern. In addition to this oil spill disaster, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) urges the authorities to also investigate and take action on the oil spills that has been occurring in Penang waters in the recent months.

SAM's interview with fishers in the Paramount Jetty near Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah a couple of weeks ago revealed that the shore has been polluted due to oil spill believed to have been discharged from shipping vessels. According to fishermen the source of pollution could not be identified because the discharge normally occurs at night. Early in the morning, fishermen reported that visible traces of oil can be observed on the shore.

The oil spills cause major harm to the ecosystems, marine life and seabirds. Besides these there are also economic losses, especially for fishermen and those engaged in mariculture. There are regulations prohibiting any discharge of oil or oily mixtures from ships to prevent pollution by oil. Hence the responsible authority must step up its monitoring mechanism and strictly enforce the regulations.

The Penang State Government had complained that it was informed of the oil spill some 24 hours after the incident occurred. In this case, the Department of Environment has overall responsibility over oil spill response with the major operating role falling to the Marine Department. Although the federal government has jurisdiction over oil responses and oil spills, the State government should be alerted immediately as subsequently the environmental damage and losses affect the State's populace.

SAM urges an investigation into allegations of oil discharge from vessels that has been occurring quite frequently in the recent months. In addition to seeking compensation for costs of clean-up operations at sea and on shore, the responsible authority must also take into account the costs for reinstatement of the environment and also damages suffered by fishermen and other sectors.

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