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[High-res photos of affected birds can be found here via Dropbox](#) (credit: International Bird Rescue):

Mystery Substance Threatens Seabirds in the San Francisco Bay

International Bird Rescue's San Francisco Bay center in emergency mode as dozens of seabirds found in Alameda, Hayward and San Leandro coated in substance suspected to be man-made

OAKLAND (Jan. 17, 2015) — Dozens of seabirds have been found on the San Francisco Bay's eastern shores covered in a viscous, mystery substance that destroys feather waterproofing, which can cause hypothermia and death.

East Bay Regional Park District staffers notified International Bird Rescue's San Francisco Bay center late Friday of a large influx of birds found on both land and water covered in the unknown substance. As of Saturday afternoon, a total of 60 seabirds, including Surf Scoters, Buffleheads and Common Goldeneyes had been transported to International Bird Rescue in Fairfield. Four have died, and an unspecified additional number of birds have been found and are awaiting transport by search-and-collection teams.

Areas of the East Bay where the birds have been found include Crab Cove in Alameda, the Hayward shoreline and the San Leandro Marina.

"We have not seen this type of substance before, and tests have shown it is not petroleum-based," said Barbara Callahan, interim executive director of International Bird Rescue who served as bird unit leader during the 2010 BP oil

spill. “Our staff veterinarian and wildlife rehabilitation team is working overtime to ensure all birds transported to us receive optimal emergency care.”

With no indication of the substance’s origin, International Bird Rescue is paying for all emergency care costs at this time and is seeking public support. Donations can be made at birdrescue.org or by mail to International Bird Rescue, 4369 Cordelia Rd, Fairfield CA 94534.

Like petroleum, the mystery substance, which is clear to pale gray in color, breaks down a bird’s feather structure, destroying the animal’s ability to regulate body temperature in the cold San Francisco Bay waters. It’s unknown whether the fluid is toxic; therefore, International Bird Rescue’s team is taking the same safety precautions with the affected birds as it does with oiled animals from a spill.

Preliminary attempts to remove the substance from feather samples coated with the substance have been unsuccessful, Callahan said.

“Because we’ve never seen a substance like this before, we’re uncertain how many of these spectacular seabirds we can save,” Callahan said. “But we will save as many as is humanely possible.”

Law enforcement officials from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) were notified of the incident and responded to begin an investigation. Several of the dead birds were taken to the CDFW Wildlife Investigation Lab in Sacramento where they will be examined and a necropsy performed to determine cause to death. CDFW law enforcement division will be working with parks and local officials on the investigation.

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[Full resolution images online](http://ow.ly/HAhtj) : <http://ow.ly/HAhtj>

Please photo credit: Cheryl Reynolds, International Bird Rescue