



**Risk Mitigation Consulting Inc.**

*Intelligence and Analysis Division*

# OPEN SOURCE UPDATE

July 2020

## **INTENT**

This open source periodical is designed to provide an overview of relevant, publicly available information on threat and hazard events and analysis of potential impacts to the interests of the United States, both at home and abroad. This product is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all threat and hazard news and inclusion in this product does not constitute a confirmation of credibility nor precedence by RMC.



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## Threats

### Remains of Fort Hood Soldier Killed by Colleague Found – *Insider Threat*

**Excerpt:** A soldier suspected in the disappearance of Fort Hood Pfc. Vanessa Guillen killed himself after police confronted him in Killeen, Texas, authorities said.

Texas Rangers arrested another civilian suspect in connection with Guillen's disappearance, according to US Army Criminal Investigation Command, which calls itself CID.

The suspect, who has not been identified, is the estranged wife of a former soldier from Fort Hood. She is in Bell County Jail awaiting civilian authorities to press charges, CID said.

"We have made significant progress in this tragic situation and are doing everything possible to get to the truth and bring answers to the family of Pfc. Vanessa Guillen," CID spokesman Chris Grey said.

**Analyst Comment:** Although an investigation is ongoing, Guillen is presumed to have been killed by the aforementioned suspect (identified as a U.S. Army soldier), who killed himself during a confrontation with pursuing police officers, as well as the suspect's apparent girlfriend, who was reportedly an accessory to the murder, assisting in the dismembering and disposal of Guillen's body.

Various open source media reports indicate that Guillen was a victim of sexual harassment within her command at Fort Hood, and that she reported this harassment to family members. It is believed that these claims were referring to the individual who ultimately killed Guillen. Additionally, Guillen reportedly stated that other female soldiers' complaints against the killer had been dismissed.

As a result, the Army has announced an independent command climate review of Fort Hood, headed by Army Under Secretary James McPherson. The review may expand to other U.S. Army installations. Sexual assault and sexual harassment remain a serious concern within DoD, with the most recent DoD annual report on sexual assault in the military noting that reported sexual assault cases rose 3% from FY2018 to FY2019, to nearly 8,000 reported cases. A variety of reporting initiatives, training requirements, and other efforts have been implemented in recent years to combat toxic command climates and other factors which enable sexual assault/harassment, although it is clear that there is still a significant amount of work to be done to enable a safe, supportive working environment within the U.S. military.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/01/us/vanessa-guillen-suspects-fort-hood/index.html>



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## Europol: Coronavirus-Related Lockdowns Provide Extremist Recruitment Opportunity – *Terrorism*

**Excerpt:** The European Union’s law enforcement agency is warning that lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic could radicalize terror suspects of all ideologies.

Europol’s latest terrorism trends report on Tuesday [23 June] emphasized the impact that the pandemic could have on exacerbating the discontent of radicalized individuals. The report also found that jihadist groups as well as both right- and left-wing extremist groups might capitalize on the social upheaval.

“These developments have the potential to further fuel the radicalization of some individuals, regardless of their ideological persuasion,” said Europol Director Catherine De Bolle in the report, according to *Agence France-Presse*. “Activists both on the extreme left and right and those involved in jihadist terrorism attempt to seize the opportunity the pandemic has created to further propagate their aims,” she added.

Europol found that in 2019, there were 26 anarchist or left-wing attacks in Europe, primarily in Greece, Italy, and Spain. That number is similar to 2017 but an increase from 2018. Europol also warned of an uptick in right-wing violence. The EU reported six right-wing attacks in 2019.

**Analyst Comment:** The effects of the pandemic on both the social and economic sectors have the potential to impact terrorist recruiting, attack attempts, and resulting deaths. Extremist ideology is often tied to economic and social concerns, so changing conditions caused by the pandemic could indicate changes in levels of extremist ideology among the public.

COVID-19 has led to lockdowns across the globe. A significant portion of the population is currently working from home via the internet. While lockdowns limit the activities and social interactions people can engage in, the internet is helping fill the gap for many. Both the UK and the US report surges in internet activity due to COVID-19 lockdown procedures.

Historically, extremist groups have used the internet to recruit individuals, disseminate information, and plan attacks. Increased internet activity has the potential to increase the spread of extremist information via internet pathways. The UN Sixth Committee (Legal) spent time in 2019 discussing terrorism and the impacts of internet activity, demonstrating the prevalence of the threat.

Considering the decrease in social interactions, increase in internet activity, and success of extremist groups use in internet recruiting, it is likely that the pandemic induced quarantines are creating a fertile environment in which some people may be more susceptible to extremist conversion. While this trend was identified by Europol, the same effects and consequences are likely to be seen across the globe, including within the United States.



Source: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/coronavirus-lockdown-could-fuel-the-radicalization-of-terrorists-eu-police>

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## Neo-Nazis Are Running Out of Places to Hide Online – *Terrorism/Insider Threat*

**Excerpt:** In March 2019, amid the aftermath of the Christchurch massacre, the far right made a collective migration from an array of messenger platforms and discussion boards to the messaging app Telegram. On their new home—the same one ISIS adopted as its digital headquarters in 2015—neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups steadily grew their audiences by the thousands. The Russian-founded, UK-based Telegram connected different far-right communities, helping to bring far more organization to the movement as a whole.

Despite repeated reporting about this trend, neo-Nazis on Telegram called for attacks on Jews, law enforcement, and minorities, and gave instructions how to do so, with no substantial counteraction. Far-right terrorist channels and groups—which they self-declare as “Terrorgram”—got to act like ISIS but saw none of the same consequences.

But amid emerging stories of neo-Nazi National Guard and Army personnel networking and plotting attacks on Telegram, the company is now taking thorough action against some of the most prominent and violence-promoting entities on its platform.

**Analyst Comment:** Since the Charlottesville, VA “Unite the Right” rally in August 2017, internet service providers and communications platforms have tried to purge far-right extremists. After the vehicular homicide of Heather Heyer, multiple service providers removed the neo-Nazi enclave *The Daily Stormer* (it has since been reestablished). Similarly, Twitter, Discord, and now, Telegram, have tried to remove users or groups promoting neo-Nazi and far-right ideology. Many times, a platform will emerge with an emphasis on free speech and a “take all comers” approach. Decentralized and open source platforms like Gab and Minds have adopted this stance. Both were quickly adopted by alt-right and neo-Nazi users. They have attempted to purge the most extreme elements, but their own protections for privacy and anonymity make this difficult.

Discouraging the far-right on any platform is a challenge. While a platform may set its own Terms of Service, it is not a crime to write about far-right ideas online. Purged users can communicate through alternate channels and reestablish themselves elsewhere. The problem is that users sometimes plot crimes in private groups or encrypted channels. In October 2018, Gab user Robert Gregory Bowers announced that he was “going in” before killing 11 people and injuring 7 at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. In June 2020, Army Pvt. Ethan Melzer was arrested for using Telegram to divulge his unit’s movements in Turkey to a U.K.-based Order of the Nine Angles (O9A), an occult-based neo-Nazi and white supremacist group. Additionally, he wanted to pass the information on to al-Qaeda. He had hoped to bring an attack on his unit.

Telegram was successful in purging most ISIS operatives using its service in November 2016. While far-right elements will migrate from platform to platform, tech companies have a



responsibility to differentiate protected speech from criminal activity and to coordinate with law enforcement as needed.

Source: <https://www.wired.com/story/neo-nazis-are-running-out-of-places-to-hide-online/>

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## U.S. Strongly Rejects China's Territorial Claims in South China Sea — Foreign Nation-State Military

**Excerpt:** The United States and the world "will not allow Beijing to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Monday [13 July], prompting China to hit back, reflecting a ratcheting up of tensions between the two powers amid deteriorating relations.

"We are making clear: Beijing's claims to offshore resources across most of the South China Sea are completely unlawful, as is its campaign of bullying to control them," Pompeo said in a statement, referring to the contentious and potentially energy-rich stretch of water.

The U.S. has long opposed China's expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea, regularly sending Navy patrols through the strategic waterways to demonstrate freedom of navigation there. Most recently, on 04 July, two U.S. aircraft carriers carried out operations in the area as the Chinese military conducted drills nearby.

**Analyst Comment:** Secretary of State Pompeo's latest statement is in line with longstanding U.S. government policy regarding territorial claims in the South China Sea. China claims the vast majority of the maritime region, much of which is also claimed by neighboring countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. The U.S. Navy routinely conducts "freedom of navigation" operations which involve the peaceful transiting of contested regions by Navy vessels. Such operations are not unique to the current Trump administration and were also conducted previously by the Obama administration.

However, the recent U.S. statement and continuing freedom of navigation operations may invite military provocations from China. Such provocations have been tracked in previous OSU's, but includes incident such a "dangerous maneuver" by a Chinese naval vessel in March 2019, in which a collision nearly occurred with a U.S. naval vessel conducting a freedom of navigation operation. China remains adamant regarding its territorial claims, and will likely continue to utilize its military to demonstrate its commitment to such claims. While Chinese military activities in the region will likely remain provocative rather than overtly hostile, provocations can lead to unnecessary escalation and potentially lead to international incidents (for example, if a collision resulted in U.S. deaths).

Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-says-most-china-s-claims-south-china-sea-n1233745>



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## French Bus Driver Brain-Dead After Mask-Related Assault – *Violent Crime*

**Excerpt:** A bus driver in Bayonne, France, suffered serious head injuries Sunday night [05 July] after he was attacked by several people attempting to board without tickets or face masks.

The driver — a man in his 50s whose name has not been released — was punched several times Sunday night [05 July] and declared brain dead Monday [06 July], according to the AFP news agency.

Several people have been arrested over the incident, according to the BBC, citing French news outlet France Bleu.

Although face masks are mandatory on all French public transportation, union sources told a local radio station that the individuals attacked the driver after he attempted to stop them from bringing a dog onto the bus.

Several bus drivers in the area refused to work on Monday [06 July] following the attack, saying it was indicative of transport company Chronoplus's failure to adequately protect drivers, according to The Local.

**Analyst Comment:** Later information revealed that four men attacked 59-year-old Philippe Monguillot after he asked three of them to wear masks and tried to check another man's ticket. The four men fled after the assault and hid in one man's apartment. Two of the men are now being charged with murder.

Currently, it is generally policy in the U.S. that a privately owned store dictates whether their shoppers must wear masks or not. Public services, including transportation and municipal buildings, follow the guidelines set in place by the local or state government. Enforcement of these policies tends to fall on the employees.

Many incidents of verbal confrontations in which individuals are asked to wear a mask while inside a store or building have been widely shared on social media in recent weeks. As more states in the U.S. implement mandatory mask policies, such confrontations between employees and customers may become more frequent. Any of these situations can escalate into a violent crime, potentially resulting in serious physical harm.

*Source:* <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/505993-french-bus-driver-seriously-injured-in-attack-after-requiring>





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## Police Investigating Vandalism, Arsons of Religious Sites, Statues in Multiple States – *Property Crime*

**Excerpt:** A slew of Catholic churches from Florida to California were burned and vandalized over the weekend as police continue to investigate whether or not they are connected to protests targeting symbols and statues.

Following George Floyd's police-related death in May, Black Lives Matter leaders and protesters called for the toppling of statues, from Confederate symbols to former U.S. presidents and abolitionists. Activist Shaun King called for all images depicting Jesus as a “white European” and his mother to be torn down because they're forms of “white supremacy” and “racist propaganda.”

**Analyst Comment:** Over the weekend of Friday, 10 July through Sunday, 12 July 2020, there were two instances of vandalism against statues of the Virgin Mary in New York and Boston, the first with spray paint and the second by setting it on fire. In Ocala, Florida, a 23-year-old man, who claimed to suffer from schizophrenia, drove his car into the front of a Catholic church during services, after which he poured gasoline in the foyer and lit it ablaze. No parishioners were injured. The San Gabriel Mission in Los Angeles also partially burned, though the cause is still under investigation. Earlier reports of a fire at a Baptist church in San Diego were incorrect.

As protests have escalated following the death of George Floyd, crowds have toppled monuments and statues across the country. Usually these are figures associated with the Confederate States of America or whom activists deem racist or enablers of white supremacy. However, statues of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, along with abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass, have also been targeted or toppled. The motive behind the latter three attacks are less clear.

The scope of the protests has expanded, and the movement has attracted proponents of a wide range of progressive causes beyond police reform and justice for George Floyd. As with all protest movements, it is possible that violent extremists will be present alongside mainstream, peaceful protestors. As unrest continues, protestors may target additional monuments and entities considered to be symbols of white supremacy. Prominent Black Lives Matter activist Shaun King recently suggested that protestors should target depictions of “the white European they claim is Jesus” that adorn many houses of worship. This is just one potential indicator suggesting why churches may have been targeted as of recent.

Because the motives behind the recent church vandalism and arsons are still unclear and investigations remain ongoing, the incidents are best categorized as incidents of property crime at this time. However, these incidents could ultimately fit the criteria of hate crimes and/or domestic terrorist attacks, depending on the motives of the perpetrators. Conversely, the incidents, if





conducted “in the heat of the moment” by angry protestors, could be better categorized as civil disturbance activity.

Source: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/church-fire-florida-california-statue-burned-police-investigation>

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## **Benzodiazepines Might be a ‘Hidden Element’ of the U.S. Overdose Epidemic – Narcotics**

**Excerpt:** Doctors have been increasingly prescribing benzodiazepines, also known as “benzos,” in recent years. Looking at data from 2014 to 2016, new research found this class of central nervous system depressants was prescribed at about 65.9 million office-based doctor visits. That's a rate of 27 annual visits per 100 adults.

The research, which analyzed data from the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, was published on Friday, 17 January 2020, by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Benzodiazepines such as alprazolam, diazepam and lorazepam can be helpful when taken on a short-term basis. Doctors often prescribe them to relieve acute anxiety, agitation or to help someone sleep. Taken over the long term, they can become addictive. In older adults, the drugs have been shown to increase the risk of falls, cloud judgment and impair memory. There is an increased risk of hospitalization and death for people who take benzos, particularly if they are taken with an opioid.

**Analyst Comment:** Benzodiazepines are prescribed to treat a range of common conditions, from seizures to anxiety to insomnia. They depress nerve activity in the brain and are generally prescribed on a short-term basis. While most Americans are well aware of the opioid crisis, few are as aware of the rise in benzodiazepine dependence and overdose. Prescription drugs like Xanax, Klonopin, and Valium are extremely common. Doctors are aware that they shouldn't overlap prescriptions between painkillers and benzodiazepines. However, individuals seeing more than one doctor may be prescribed both accidentally. Individuals suffering from addiction may also “doctor shop” in search of additional prescriptions. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, about 30% of opioid overdoses are actually caused by the combination of opioids and benzodiazepine. Dependence on benzodiazepine is also common. Quitting “cold turkey” without a doctor's supervision can produce dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

The radical changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unstable situation for many individuals on prescription drugs. Many Americans are working from home or have become underemployed or unemployed. The tedium, isolation, and uncertainty may tempt recovering addicts to relapse. Patients may have difficulty accessing therapy or group meetings. The increase in stress may, concordantly, increase the demand for anti-anxiety drugs by new patients, who may be unprepared for the side effects, interactions, and possibility of dependence or overdose. According to open source reporting, suspected drug overdoses increased nationwide by 18% in



March, 29% in April, and 42% in May. It is incumbent upon public health officials at the local, state, and federal level to educate patients and help to prevent future overdoses.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/20/health/benzodiazepines-prescriptions-study/index.html>

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## Hoax Draws Armed Militia and Far-Right Demonstrators to Gettysburg – *Civil Disturbance*

**Excerpt:** Armed rightwing militia groups descended on Gettysburg, Pennsylvania over the weekend, in a bid to protect the historic town from a flag-burning protest that never occurred and was in all likelihood a fake event advertised on social media.

Dozens of militia members, some from as far away as Delaware, came to the site of a pivotal civil war battle in 1863, after posts on Facebook claimed anti-fascist groups planned to protest there over the Fourth of July national holiday.

The online rumours appeared to originate from posts written by a group named “Left Behind USA”, which promised an event where attendees would “burn flags in protest of thugs and animals in blue”, according to now deleted messages reviewed by the Washington Post.

The posts also said organisers would “be giving away free small flags to children to safely throw into the fire”.

**Analyst Comment:** On the Fourth of July holiday, dozens of armed militia members and far-right protestors gathered in anticipation of the event. As examined in the AHTA, potential for civil disturbance activity arises in cases where protestors and counter-protesters clash. A large number of such incidents have occurred in connection with the recent protests surrounding police brutality and institutional racism.

This scenario, drawing counter-protestors to a fake event, is still relatively infrequent and unusual. However, there have been incidents in recent years where the presence (or anticipated presence) of large number of counter-protestors has led to an event being moved or cancelled. These situations, where a group of counter-protests gather in anticipation of a clash, have the potential to escalate despite the presence of the anticipated protest.

For example, on 13 June, an estimated 3,000 far-right activists gathered in London to protect monuments from being torn down by protestors. When no such protestors appeared, the far-right members clashed with the police. The crowd threw traffic cones, flag poles, and smoke flares at the police before breaching the police barriers.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/06/gettysburg-militias-flag-burning-protest-hoax>

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## Hazards

### Extreme Heat Impacts During COVID-19 Pandemic – *Meteorological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** COVID-19 has amplified the risks of hot weather for those already most vulnerable to the negative effects of extreme heat. In particular, this includes the elderly (>65 years), and those with pre-existing health conditions (e.g. cardiovascular, pulmonary, kidney disease; diabetes/obesity), essential workers who work outside during the hottest time of the day, and many others. Having the virus can also increase a person's susceptibility to heat-related illnesses due to COVID-19's effects on the lungs and heart.

Implemented social distancing measures can lead some people to avoid protective behaviors like visiting cooling centres or checking in on older neighbors to ensure they have a way to hydrate and cool down. Self-isolation may in addition increase heat-related illness and mortality risk at home, particularly of older people, individuals with disabilities, people with mental health issues unable to interpret or take appropriate protective measures, people in residential care facilities, and those without air conditioning, or cooling devices.

Especially urban areas are hotspots of risk due to their density, housing millions of potentially vulnerable residents, and physical composition, whereby materials that absorb and trap heat, create "heat island" effects. Cities are therefore on the front lines of managing this public health emergency.

**Analyst Comment:** In a typical year, heat waves kill more people than all other natural disasters combined. As mentioned in previous OSUs, the past five years have been the hottest on record. Climate change trends show there is, and will continue to be, an increasing number of extreme heat days across the globe.

Populations vulnerable to both extreme heat and COVID-19 include the elderly and those with chronic diseases. The heat and virus both impact each other. If the heat keeps people isolated, that could slow the pandemic. However, that also means more people staying inside, utilizing air conditioning, potentially resulting in an increase in aerosol transmission. Workplaces in particular may provide greater opportunities for aerosol transmission as windows and doors are closed and recycled air is constantly circulated via AC.

There are also segments of the population who do not have access to adequate cooling systems as heat waves hit. In past years, access to city-owned spaces like libraries, recreation centers, and city pools helps mitigate the effects of extreme hit on the population. However, many of those facilities could become a source of local transmission and are now closed. Those that are open remain an opportunity for individuals to gather in an enclosed space, and, while cooling off, transmit the virus.



Cities will struggle this summer to cope with the summer heat and care for vulnerable populations while avoiding further increases in case numbers. The potential for an abnormally high number of heat related deaths this summer is increasing as the virus continues to spread throughout the U.S.

Source: <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/72509>

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## DoD's COVID-19 Cases Growing at Twice the National Rate – *Biological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** More than 4,100 service members have tested positive for coronavirus since 1 July, according to the Defense Department's latest statistics, a rise of about 33% in the last 10 days. That is more than twice the rate of growth nationwide during the same period, 16%, as the U.S. more than once broke its daily records for new cases.

There were three new deaths, all of contractors or civilians, during this period as well.

Defense officials have attributed the recent rise in military cases both to increased testing and to the lifting of shelter-in-place orders in some force concentration areas, while expressing faith that local commanders are enforcing protective measures like social distancing and face covering for their troops.

**Analyst Comment:** The Department of Defense (DoD) has been involved in the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic every step of the way. It has also worked to control the outbreak among regular personnel. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines are often required to work in close quarters with each other. This has forced all of the services to confront a "new normal" in order to both prevent infections and maintain operational readiness. The outbreaks aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Kidd forced the Navy to issue new guidelines for testing, quarantining, and contact tracing, even with ships at sea that are unable to evacuate infected sailors.

Regardless, each service's healthcare workers have a unique ability to administer testing to personnel. Their civilian counterparts can only encourage citizens to seek testing in accordance with local guidelines and subject to the availability of test kits. This more robust testing capacity may misrepresent the infection rate. In fact, according to the same piece from *Military Times*, the overall rate of infection among DoD personnel is only 0.8%, compared to 0.9% of the general population. While not every single uniformed servicemember, civilian, and contractor has been tested, a greater percentage has been compared to the overall civilian population. A positive test also generates additional testing in the course of contact tracing.

The uniformed services can also mandate social distancing, mask-wearing, and other mitigation strategies. However, many personnel reside off-base. The DoD has issued orders for personnel to avoid potential civilian hotspots (including dine-in restaurants, theaters, non-essential retail establishments, among others). But the Department is limited in its ability to monitor personnel at all times. In the best-case scenario, the DoD may reduce or even eliminate the infection early on and provide a set of best practices for consideration by civilian healthcare.



Source: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/07/10/militarys-covid-19-cases-growing-at-twice-the-nationwide-rate/>

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## Naval Vessel Catches Fire at San Diego Base – *Accidental Events*

**Excerpt:** Marking significant progress, firefighters were able to move deeper inside the fire-engulfed USS Bonhomme Richard on Tuesday [14 July] on their third day of battling the flames. But a top Navy official said it was too soon to say if the 23-year-old ship that is burning on opposite ends will be salvageable.

Navy officials were able to inspect four main engineering rooms and found no major damage, and the external structure of the ship appears to be safe, said Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, the commander of the strike group whose flagship is the USS Bonhomme Richard.

But he cautioned at a briefing that there is still “a major fire inside” being fought by hundreds of sailors who were focusing their efforts on two isolated spots near the stern and the bow of the ship. It was unclear if there were two distinct fires on board or if the area burning near the tail end was simply from the heat of a single large blaze, Sobeck said.

**Analyst Comment:** The fire onboard the USS Bonhomme Richard has been active since 13 July, and at the time of writing on 15 July, is still an active situation. The USS Bonhomme Richard is a Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, which resembles a small aircraft carrier. The fire started as the vessel was undergoing maintenance at Naval Base San Diego, and a Navy official stated that the vessel’s fire suppression system was turned off at the time of the blaze due to the maintenance work. The fire has resulted in nearly 60 people being treated for minor injuries, as well as heat- and smoke-related complaints.

Additionally, the fire prompted air quality advisories for the surrounding area. Individuals who have health concerns or those who smell smoke are advised to close their windows and limit time spent outdoors (to include exercising) due to air quality concerns. There is no stated concern regarding toxicity of the fumes, rather, the advisories relate to the inhalation of particulate matter emanating from the fire.

Source: <https://time.com/5866920/navy-warship-fire/>

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## Arctic Oil Spill Could Take Decades to Clean Up – *Accidental Events*

**Excerpt:** After a storage tank in Norilsk, northern Russia, collapsed in late May, 20,000 tonnes of diesel fuel was released into the environment. Strong winds caused the oil to spread more than 12 miles from the source, contaminating nearby rivers, lakes and the surrounding soil.

The spill perhaps didn't get the international attention it warranted as it happened in the midst of a global pandemic and just a few days after the death of African-American George Floyd, which



sparked a wave of Black Lives Matter protests. But the spill was a major disaster with serious implications.

As experts in Arctic ecosystems, we are worried about the long-term impacts of this diesel spill in such pristine environments where cold, harsh conditions mean that life is limited. While bacteria are known to "clean up" oil spills elsewhere in the world, in the Arctic, their low numbers and slow rates of activity could mean diesel products linger for years, if not decades.

**Analyst Comment:** A Russian government official stated that employees at the power station initially tried to contain the spill on their own, and did not report the incident to the proper authorities for two days. Russia has also launched a criminal investigation into the spill, suggesting that negligence may have been responsible for the failure of the storage tank that spilled the fuel into surrounding waterways.

However, the company that owned the tank denies such responsibility and claims that the tank failed due to rapidly thawing permafrost. According to open source reporting, there is a significant amount of oil and gas-related infrastructure in the Arctic regions of Russia which are vulnerable to the effects of the thawing of permafrost, which can create unstable ground, and potential failure of equipment such as fuel storage tanks. While an investigation into this particular incident is still ongoing, current climatological conditions (to include the effects of climate change) may lead to future incidents.

Source: <https://phys.org/news/2020-07-tonne-oil-contaminating-arctic-decades.html>

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