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What a MESS!

By Maria Gill

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Oily Beginnings

The wildlife officer knelt in coral-white sand and dug a deep hole until he felt a row of eggs. Before lifting any out, he drew a pencil line on the eggs so he would know which way was “up” when he stored them. Then he picked up an egg with his gloved hand and put it into a container. A **volunteer** packed sand around it. They continued removing eggs from the nest and placing them in containers, making sure the pencil marks on the eggs faced up. Once the nest was empty, they carried the container to a car and drove the turtle eggs hundreds of miles away from the **oil**-soaked coast of Alabama. If left to hatch on this northern Gulf of Mexico beach, the turtles would have swum right into an oily ocean and died.

Fast Fact

The very first oil spill occurred in 1818. Two men digging for salt drilled a hole, and hit a pocket of oil. It gushed out and flooded the Cumberland River in Kentucky.



Oil has been seeping into the ocean since the days of dinosaurs. Ancient Egyptians used petroleum when preparing mummies for burial. The ancient Chinese pumped gas using bamboo poles, 2,500 years ago. **Native Americans** rubbed oil over their canoes to waterproof them. People in India treated diseases with oil. People in Poland used oil to light lamps 500 years ago, and the Persians have been **excavating** oil for more than 400 years. Still, it wasn't until cars came along and people began using **electricity** to light their houses that the demand for oil really shot up.



Fast Fact

Crude oil and petroleum are both names for unprocessed oil that comes out of the ground, but petroleum may also contain gases and solids.



The more people transported and drilled for oil, the more oil spills there were. Thousands of animals die in oil-polluted waters every year. Millions of tons of crude oil end up in our oceans, rivers, and land. Some of it is from oil spills, some from natural **seepage**, but a lot comes from oil being poured down the drain or oil washing off roads.

Fast Fact

Once, all oil was tiny plants and animals that lived in the sea. When they died, they sank to the bottom of the sea and were covered in mud and sand. Over millions of years, weight, heat, and **bacteria** changed them into oil.

