



Tarballs

Why in News

Recently, black oil-emanating balls also called **Tarballs** were seen, lying on the shore of Mumbai Beach.

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Key Points

▪ About:

- Tarballs are dark-coloured, sticky balls of oil that **form when crude oil floats on the ocean surface**. They are formed by weathering of crude oil in marine environments.
- Some of the balls are as big as a basketball while others are smaller globules. They are **transported** from the open sea to the shores **by sea currents and waves**.
- Most of the time, the presence of several tarballs **indicate an oil spill**. However, its annual occurrence on the west coast during the monsoon has led marine biologists and experts to demand an investigation in the matter.
- Oil-well blowouts, accidental and deliberate release of bilge and ballast water from ships, river runoff, discharges through municipal sewage and industrial effluents also **leads to the formation of tarballs**.
- Once tarballs hit the beaches, they **may be picked up by hand or by beach-cleaning machinery**.

▪ Concerns:

- Tarballs that travel towards the coast **can get stuck to the fishing nets** installed in the sea, making it difficult for fishermen to clean.
- In addition, it **could affect marine life**, especially filter feeders like clams and oysters.
- Tarballs are **difficult to break down**, and can therefore travel for hundreds of miles in the sea. **Tarball pollution** is a major concern to the global marine ecosystem.
- **Food retrieved from the coastal waters** including fish and other sea food **might also get contaminated** and become a part of the larger food chain harming the health of

people.

Source: IE

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