Environmental Incident Report: Toxic Oil Spills in Sulaymaniyah Province

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Reporting period: 20 October – 19 November 2025

Report Date: 19 November 2025

Figure 1 - Khalakan Oil Spill

1. Executive Summary

Since **20 October 2025**, multiple **toxic oil spills** have been documented across Sulaymaniyah Province, beginning in **Khalakan(Dukan District)** and rapidly spreading to new locations including **Torba Village, Piramagrun, Arbat, Tanjaro, Sharazoor, Derbandikhan, and Penjwen**.

The spills contain **hazardous waste oils**, believed to be byproducts of illegal or unregulated refinery processes involving **sulfuric acid mixed with black oil/asphalt** to produce low-quality fuel for illicit export. These wastes—highly toxic and environmentally persistent—have been dumped directly into soil, valleys, grazing lands, and waterways.

If not contained, these materials threaten:

- Dukan and Darbandikhan Reservoirs
- Drinking water for over **2 million people**
- Soil health
- Aquatic ecosystems and wildlife
- Livestock and agriculture
- Human health through air and water pollution

Despite emergency actions at the first site, **most spill locations remain untreated**, and the **recent rains (mid-November)** have washed toxic waste into streams and rivers.

This report outlines the full timeline, media escalation, government intervention, community impact, and ongoing risks.

Since its early days in 2014, Waterkeepers Iraq has consistently monitored and exposed environmental violations across the region, often long before they reach public attention. In this link, viewer can find one of our early reports documenting similar oil spills along the Tanjero River in 2015–2016—evidence of a crisis we have been warning about for nearly a decade.

Figure 2 - Khalakan Oil Spill

2. Initial Report & First Discovery

18 October 2025

Waterkeepers Iraq was contacted by environmental volunteers and local residents in **Dukan District**, reporting a **large black oil spill** in **Khalakan**. The spill was flowing downhill toward **Dukan Lake**, a major water reservoir.

20 October 2025

A Waterkeepers Iraq team visited the site to:

- Document video evidence
- Assess the environmental impact
- Publish an early warning about the risk to drinking water supplies

The video warned that untreated contamination could reach drinking water for **over 2 million residents**.
Link to video on Youtube: https://youtu.be/6zIy1KhqXjk?si=txZwxVlJxjF6KPeg

This initial publication triggered broad public concern.

3. Public Reaction & Media Amplification

Within 24 hours, the video went viral. It was reshared and picked up by major pages and organizations including:

- 964 Media
- SNN
- Ainda Zhenga
- Xelk Media
- Local Dukan-area influencers

22–23-24 October

The incident was taken up by large media outlets:

- NRT
- KNN
- Ava Media
- Kurdistan 24
- Channel 8

The spill became a top social-media topic in Sulaymaniyah region.

23–24 October

The **Mayor of Dukan** visited the site in person.

The **Forestry Police** and **Department of Environment (DoE) – Sulaymaniyah** intervened and formed a **joint committee** to address the crisis.

Committee members included:

- Department of Environment (lead)
- The Mayor of Dukan
- Forestry Police
- Gardeen Group
- Lafarge Company

Press conference: https://web.facebook.com/reel/1315778413120507

Emergency Response Actions (First Site Only)

- Gardeen Group covered the oil slick with soil/sand (23 November)
- Contaminated soil was to be transported to Lafarge company
- Material was to be burned in the concrete plant's incinerator

This was the **only** site that received treatment.

Figure 3 - Khalakan Oil Spill

4. Spread of the Crisis – New Spills Found (Second & Third Sites)

25–26 October

Following our initial video, Waterkeepers Iraq received multiple new alerts.

On **26 October**, the team conducted field visits to two additional sites:

Site 2: Torba Village (Dukan Area)

A new spill similar to Khalakan was discovered.

The material had spread under oak trees and along grazing land, affecting wildlife and livestock areas.

Link to Video: https://web.facebook.com/share/v/1DJj1SfBHL/

Site 3: Piramagrun

While returning from Torba, the team discovered a **third major spill** in **Piramagrun District**, near the main city landfill area.

This event was documented on video with support from: **Anna Bachmann**, American scientist and co-founder of Waterkeepers Iraq

Anna provided expert assessment on the chemical nature of the waste, confirming its danger to human health, vegetation, and wildlife.

Link to Video: https://web.facebook.com/share/v/1DJj1SfBHL/

Figure 4 - Piramagrun Oil Spill

5. Escalation – Multiple Locations Across the Province

After 26 October, reports increased dramatically.

Verified locations of spills by early November:

- **Khalakan (Dukan)**
- **Torba Village (Dukan)**
- **Piramagrun District**
- **Tanjaro Industrial Zone**
- **Arbat Region**
- **Sharazoor**
- **Zhalai Xwarw**
- **Penjwen**

Local eyewitnesses, farmers, journalists, and organizations reported ongoing dumping activities.

Dead livestock and wildlife

A farmer in Tanjaro reported 3 buffalo deaths due to toxic exposure.

Bird deaths were recorded in both Torba and Piramagrun.

6. Legal Action & Government Response

5 November 2025

Waterkeepers Iraq alongside Spee Media, KNN representative, other CSOs and environmental activists and a local farmer harmed by the spills —filed the case in court to demand enforcement and intervention.

https://web.facebook.com/share/p/14TsP1ZAc6w/

Figure 5 - Sulaimaniyah Court

6 November

During election week (which slowed government operations), Spee Media and KNN reported:

- **11 illegal oil refineries** were shut down, inspected, or questioned
- **12 individuals** arrested for investigation
- **6 refineries fully closed**

This confirmed the existence of illegal refinery networks linked to the spills.

7. Source of the Toxic Waste – What's Really Happening

Multiple investigations indicate two likely sources:

1. Production of low-quality fuel through illegal processes

Some refineries were mixing **Sulfuric acid** (H_2SO_4) and **Waste oil / black oil / asphalt** to create a crude gasoline product for illicit sale, including smuggling to **Afghanistan**.

The leftover waste—highly toxic—was dumped into valleys, streams, and grazing lands.

2. Industrial dumping from Tanjaro area

Unregulated and illegal facilities in **Tanjaro industrial zone** appear to be disposing of waste into open land and creeks, expecting rains to wash it away into rivers.

Both scenarios point to:

- Organized illegal operations
- Lack of enforcement
- Absence of hazardous waste management infrastructure

Figure 6 - Photo of the Tanker Dumping the waste in Khalakan Location

8. Impact of November Rains

By **mid-November**, rainfall arrived.

Because only the **first spill site** (Khalakan) had been treated, all other documented sites remained untreated and exposed.

Consequences:

- Toxic waste washed downstream
- Chemicals entering streams, valleys, and eventually **Tanjaro River**
- High likelihood of contamination reaching:
  - **Dukan Lake**
  - **Darbandikhan Dam**
- Soil absorption and long-term ecosystem damage
- Air pollution due to volatile compounds
- Health risk to nearby settlements

As of **19 November 2025**, all untreated spill sites remain active and spreading.

9. Current Status (as of 19 November 2025)

- First spill (Khalakan) treated → **partially contained**
- All other spills → **untreated, spreading, environmental disaster escalating**
- Illegal refinery investigations ongoing
- Drinking water contamination risk remains **high**

10. Recommendations & Urgent Actions Needed

Immediate Actions

1. **Full government review of all spill sites** with coordinated cleanup plans.
2. **Hazardous waste containment** using absorbent barriers, soil removal, and controlled disposal.
3. **Testing of drinking water at all treatment plants**, especially after rainfall.
4. **Independent laboratory testing** of soil and water at contaminated locations.

Legal & Structural Actions

5. Close all illegal refineries permanently; prosecute operators.
6. Regulate industrial operations in Tanjaro and similar zones.
7. Establish official hazardous waste handling centers.
8. Improve monitoring systems

Public & Ecosystem Health

9. Evaluate wildlife and livestock impacts; compensate affected farmers.
10. Implement long-term restoration for damaged valleys and grazing land.

11. Conclusion

The series of oil spills across Sulaymaniyah Province constitutes a **major environmental emergency**. The scale of contamination, the number of affected sites, and the involvement of illegal refineries demonstrate systemic gaps in regulation and hazardous waste management.

With rainfall already spreading the toxic waste into waterways, the situation requires **urgent, coordinated action** from government authorities, environmental departments, and local enforcement.

Waterkeepers Iraq will continue monitoring, reporting, documenting, and advocating for immediate intervention to protect the region's water, wildlife, and communities.

If you want Waterkeepers Iraq to continue monitoring, protecting, and being the voice of our rivers, you can support us with a donation through this link. DONATE NOW!