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No Colors Left, the Amazon is Painted Black



By [Ximena Warnaars](#) [1]

Last month, the Chiriaco River in the Peruvian Amazon was painted black with more than [2,000 barrels of crude oil](#) [2]. The spill has severely impacted the river, and the lives in and around the river, including the eight indigenous communities with about 5,000 people who depend on the river for their survival.

The North Peruvian Oilduct II, operated by PetroPeru, ruptured- releasing the oil into one of the tributaries of Marañon River, which in turn flows into the Amazon River towards Brazil.

This month, there was another spill in the Morona river basin in Mayuriaga, that also flows to the Marañon. This spill affects ten more indigenous communities and around 3,500 people.

These spills are not without precedent.

In July 2014, more than 2,000 barrels spilled into the Cuninico stream located in indigenous territory that spread for more than 12 kilometers. It was documented that 2,600 barrels of oil that affected communities in Cuninico and 7,500 barrels in San Francisco near the Pacaya Samiria National Park.

The oil duct has been operating since 1976 and runs in the northern part of the country for over 100 kilometers, carrying crude to the Atlantic Ocean port of Bayóvar, Piura. According to the government Agency for Environmental Assessment and Enforcement (OEFA) PetroPeru has not carried out any maintenance of the duct since 1999. The duct also serves the same oil blocks where Occidental Petroleum used to operate.

Regarding the Chiriaco spill, Edwin Montenegro the president of the Regional Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Northern Amazon of Peru (ORPIAN -P) stated that PetroPeru was offering local affected communities 10 soles (approximately \$3) for each bucket of crude oil collected from the spill site. The unfortunate result was that more than 200 people from communities are collecting the oil, including children, without proper protection to do so.

[ORPIAN-P has filed a complaint with the OEFA](#) [3], alleging a lack of maintenance on the North



Peruvian Pipeline and failure to respond in a timely manner to the leak.

The environmental disaster comes at a time when the Peruvian government has weakened its abilities to enforce environmental protection through Law 30230 passed last year, that severely cut back the legal competences of the OEFA limiting them in their function to hold companies account, fine or impose sanctions. Notwithstanding, the company has been fined by the Ministry of Environment with 60 million soles (roughly US\$17 million).

According to the president of PetroPeru, Germán Velásquez, the Chiriaco spill was due to geological causes, while the spill in Mayuriaga due to “external forces as lightning was reported in the area”.

To get involved, add your name to this [action by Amazon Watch](#) [4]. You can also [tweet the action](#) [5] out to your followers!

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