

Dtc\_CoChiracPrestigeTranscript

"Chirac: France Will Go After Those Responsible for Oil Spill" *Paul Miller 03 Jan 2003*

With oil from a tanker that sank weeks ago now washing up on France's Atlantic beaches, French President Jacques Chirac says his government will go after those responsible for the oil spill. The government has begun an investigation that could lead to criminal charges, if it is found that the spill was due to lax safety or the violation of other maritime rules.

The tanker *Prestige* sank off the coast of Spain last November - oil leaking from the ship has ruined some Spanish fishing grounds and beaches. But it was not until this week that globs of tar and congealed fuel oil began to wash up on the beaches of southwestern France. The government has closed those beaches and activated clean up programs using soldiers and volunteers.

The prime minister and environmental minister toured the coast in the Bordeaux area Friday to see the extent of what is expected to be a continuing problem that could last for months. The thick oil, which has broken up into millions of relatively small chunks, is scattered over a wide area of the Atlantic and storms are expected to keep pushing more of it onto the French coast.

President Jacques Chirac said Friday he would not simply accept an environmental catastrophe that was the result of wrongdoing. He promised that France and the European Union would go after hoodlums who had taken advantage of the system.

French prosecutors will try to determine who was responsible for the oil spill - the captain of the *Prestige*, the crew, the ship's owners or the operators. The captain has been in jail in Spain since the *Prestige* sank.