



ISCO NEWSLETTER

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ISCO & THE ISCO NEWSLETTER

The ISCO Newsletter is published weekly by the International Spill Control Organisation, a not-for-profit organisation supported by members in 45 countries. ISCO has Consultative Status at IMO, Observer Status at IOPC Funds and is dedicated to raising worldwide preparedness and co-operation in response to oil and chemical spills, promoting technical development and professional competency, and to providing a focus for making the knowledge and experience of spill control professionals available to IMO, UNEP, EC and other organisations.

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International news

WORLD MARITIME DAY 2014: IMO CONVENTIONS: EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

September 25 - IMO is celebrating World Maritime Day, with the theme "IMO conventions: effective implementation".

World Maritime Day is celebrated every year, providing an opportunity to focus attention on the importance of shipping safety, maritime security and the marine environment and to emphasize a particular aspect of IMO's work. Individual Governments are encouraged to mark the day, on a date of their choosing but usually in the last week of September.

Each World Maritime Day has its own theme, which is reflected in IMO's work throughout the year. In 2014, the attention has centred on the need for ratification, widespread entry into force and effective implementation of IMO conventions, in order to ensure tangible benefits emerge from the often-lengthy process leading to the adoption of an IMO treaty instrument.

In his World Maritime Day message, IMO Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu said that the theme had enabled IMO to make genuine progress towards ratification, entry into force and implementation of all IMO conventions – but especially those which have yet to be widely accepted.

"For an IMO convention to be properly effective, it needs early entry into force, widespread ratification, effective implementation, stringent oversight of compliance and vigorous enforcement. Even those conventions that command almost universal coverage of the global fleet, such as SOLAS and MARPOL, only have teeth if they are backed up by an effective implementation infrastructure at the national level," Mr. Sekimizu said.

In launching this theme at the beginning of 2014, IMO Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu began by posing a series of rhetorical questions: what is the point of

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International news (continued)

working for months, even for years, to develop and adopt an international convention if that convention doesn't enter into force? What is the point of all the technical work, the debates and discussion, the negotiations and compromises required to create an instrument that can be universally adopted if that instrument does not then become part of the international legal framework?

The answer, of course, is that there is very little point at all. It is, he remarked, like writing a book that nobody reads, or making a film that nobody sees. It's only half the job - less than half, in fact, when it comes to IMO conventions. For an IMO convention to be properly effective, it needs early entry into force, widespread ratification, effective implementation, stringent oversight of compliance and vigorous enforcement.

IMO has paid particular attention during this year to the Ballast Water Management Convention, the Hong Kong Convention on ship recycling, the Cape Town Agreement of 2012 to implement the Torremolinos Protocol on fishing vessel safety, the 2010 Protocol to the HNS Convention and the Nairobi Convention on wreck removal. There has been welcome success this year in terms of new ratifications, and the Nairobi Convention will enter into force in 2015. However, much remains to be done.

It is the Member States alone who have the ability to bring instruments into effect, but IMO's extensive technical cooperation programme helps support Member States that may lack resources, expertise or both to meet their obligations. The forthcoming mandatory audit scheme for Member States will also be an important tool for assessing Member States' performance in meeting their obligations and responsibilities as flag, port and coastal States under the relevant IMO treaties.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also issued a message for World Maritime Day, recalling the "often unheralded but always vital contribution by international shipping to peoples and communities all over the world."

"At a time when the world is beset by conflict and crisis, it is easy to forget that, day in and day out, the international shipping industry works quietly and efficiently to keep the wheels of global trade in motion and ensure the timely delivery of the goods and commodities," Mr. Ban said. www.imo.org

International news (continued)

WORLD MARITIME DAY PARALLEL EVENT

The World Maritime Day Parallel Event will be held in Morocco from 27 to 29 October 2014. For detailed information please see www.worldmaritimedaymorocco.com/

Incident reports from around the world

USA: LIBERTY SHIP SS JEREMIAH O'BRIEN SPILLS FUEL INTO SAN FRANCISCO BAY AT FISHERMAN'S WHARF



Photo: SS Jeremiah O'Brien at San Francisco's pier 45. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

September 21 - The U.S. Coast Guard and California Department of Fish and Wildlife personnel continued Sunday to respond to a fuel oil spill from the SS Jeremiah O'Brien near Pier 45 at Fisherman's Wharf in the San Francisco Bay Saturday.

The U.S. Coast Guard was alerted Saturday morning that an undetermined amount of fuel oil was discharged into the water from the World War II-era Liberty Ship. First responders reported a 100-by-150-yard sheen in the vicinity of the vessel at Pier 45.

The SS Jeremiah O'Brien immediately contracted an Oil Spill Response Organization and as of Sunday over 6,000 feet of boom was deployed around the vessel and other at-risk or environmentally sensitive areas. Meanwhile cleanup crews used vacuum trucks and skimming vessels as part of the recovery efforts. *gCaptain* [Read more](#)

Incident reports from around the world (continued)

THAILAND: OIL SPILL HITS RAYONG BEACH

September 22 - An oil spill has hit a 1-kilometre stretch of Mae Ramphueng beach in Rayong's Muang district, triggering concerns about the impact on tourism in the province's popular beach. Fishermen alerted reporters Sunday to the oil slick, which resembles asphalt flakes on the beach, in front of Wang Thong Resort in Ban Kon Ao of tambon Phae. Officials said they are still trying to determine the source of the spill. *Bangkok Post* [Read more](#)

MEXICO: SONORA STATE REPORTS NEW MINE SPILL

September 22 - The Mexican authorities have issued a new alert about a toxic spill into a river from a copper mine run by the mining giant Grupo Mexico. Officials in the northern state of Sonora asked people not to use water from the Bacanuchi river after an orange stain appeared in it.

On 7 August gallons of sulphuric acid poured into the river. At the time local officials accused the company of trying to conceal the accident and of lax supervision. The chemical, which is used to dissolve copper from ore, turned a 60km (40-mile) stretch of the Sonora River orange, causing the authorities to shut down the municipal water supply to 20,000 people in seven towns.

Following the reports of a new spillage, the mining company said a storm overflow after heavy rains had caused a new leak. *BBC News* [Read more](#) [Related report in Business Recorder](#) [Thanks to ADR Training UK]

CHILE: TANKER CAUSES OIL SPILL IN CHILE

September 25 - An oil spill has been reported at Quintero Bay, Nr Valparaiso, Chile, following an incident on Wednesday at the Monobuoy Terminal when the MT Mimosa cut off hoses and cargo connection, resulting in a spill of around three cubic meters at sea.

Following the incident, ENAP (terminal owners) in coordination with the National Maritime Authority of Chile deployed a team of expert environmental personnel to mitigate the impact on the environment, by employing absorbent sleeves and installing barriers with an 800 meters extension. Concurrently, an investigation was established with the involved stakeholders to determine the causes of this incident. *The Maritime Executive* [Read more](#)

Other news reports from around the world

NEWS REPORTS FROM USA

September 18 - Enbridge oil spill drill showcases emergency response development



Men in hard-hats and safety vests loaded a boom into boats, so it could be put into the water and direct any oil towards the shore to be collected.

It was everything you would see during a major emergency response... only there was no oil in the Indian River on Wednesday. It was a training exercise.

Over 200 Enbridge, local, state and federal agency staff converged on a small area of Northern Michigan for the drill, about 30 miles south of the Mackinac Bridge.

Since 2010, the Canadian pipeline company has been under increased scrutiny in Michigan after its spill in the Kalamazoo River. Environmental organizations and politicians have recently expressed concern about Line 5, which runs through Michigan and crosses the Straits of Mackinac, because of how important that area is to Michigan. Enbridge says it tests the pipeline and that it is

safe, but different groups want more documentation and state regulation.

The simulation itself presented a third-party contractor working at a nearby house when the pipeline ruptures. Enbridge's central command notices a loss in pressure, shuts down the line and sends a pipeline maintenance crew to look into the problem. Area 911 emergency dispatchers receive calls about the smell of gasoline and local police and fire departments go the scene.

According to the scenario, about 1,000 barrels, or about 31,000 gallons, of light crude oil left the Line 5 pipeline. The exercise was scheduled to last 8 hours during the second day of response. *KSI UK* [Read more](#) [Thanks to Mike Rancilio, ISCO]

NEWS REPORTS FROM USA (Continued)

September 19 - Kinder Morgan Builds Out Gulf Coast Logistics Hub in U.S. Oil Boom

To capitalize on a flood of domestic and Canadian crude into the U.S. Gulf Coast, logistics giant Kinder Morgan Energy Partners is spending more than \$1.5 billion in Houston to build the most flexible oil and fuel transport hub in the country.

The company's expanding infrastructure smorgasbord includes a bit of almost everything at the increasingly crowded Houston Ship Channel – all next door to the biggest concentration of refiners in the country. The buildout, executives say, responds to the increasingly dynamic world of physical crude trading in North America, where the variety of available crudes is growing, and is aimed at securing their central position in moving oil from the U.S. shale boom to market. *gCaptain* [Read more](#)

September 19 - WV DEP releases rough draft of emergency rule in response to chemical spill

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection on Sept. 18 released the first version of a legislative rule required of them to come up with through Senate Bill 373. SB 373, the aboveground storage tank bill crafted in response to the Jan. 9 2014 chemical leak, requires the WV DEP to include initial inspection and certification of the tanks as well as submitting Spill Prevention Response plans.

The agency released the rough draft of its response plans in order to get the public involved immediately. The WV DEP is asking for the public to send suggestions for the draft emergency rule-making process by Oct. 24. However, there will still be chance for the public to participate in the process afterwards. The rough draft of the current emergency rule can be found [HERE](#).

The State Journal [Read more](#)

September 22 - NJIT researchers working to safeguard the shoreline

An NJIT research team has estimated the total mass of oil that reached the Gulf of Mexico shore in the wake of the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout. It's the first time such an estimate was reported, and the study is published in the August issue of Environmental Science and Technology.

The researchers found that 22,000 tons of oil reached the Gulf shoreline in 2010. This finding will help officials determine the persistence of oil on the shore and identify potential harm to the ecosystem. The study was conducted by the Center for Natural Resources Development and Protection (NRDP) at NJIT, whose director, Michel Boufadel, is known internationally for oil-spill research. Three researchers from the center -- Xiaolong Geng, Ali Abdollahi Nasab, and Jagadish Torlapati - assisted Boufadel in the study. *TerraDaily* [Read more](#)

September 22 - Derailed: Railroad delays first responders on riverside oil spill

FOX31 Denver has confirmed a May 9 crude oil train car derailment near LaSalle, Colorado polluted area groundwater with toxic levels of benzene. Environmental Protection Agency records from July show benzene measurements as high as 144 parts per billion near the crash site. Five parts per billion is considered the safe limit.

Federal accident records also show six Union Pacific tankers ripped apart from the train and flipped into a ditch due to a "track misalignment caused by a soft roadbed." One of the tankers cracked and spilled approximately 7,000 gallons of Niobrara crude, according to the EPA. *Fox 31 Denver* [Read more](#)

September 23 - 'This Is the Worst Possible Place for an Oil Spill in the Great Lakes'

Line 5 of the Enbridge oil pipeline system consists of two steel pipes 20 inches in diameter that lie at the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac, a narrow strip of water separating Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas. The Canadian energy company Enbridge brought Line 5 online in 1953; today, the pipes help transport nearly 23 million gallons of crude oil a day between the US and Canada.

The five-mile stretch of pipeline under the straits is situated at the meeting point of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan — two of the five Great Lakes that together hold 90 percent of America's fresh water. The strait lies just west of Mackinac Island, a popular tourist destination listed as a US Historic Landmark. And the channel generates extremely powerful currents — they can flow east or west — that at times create a flow of water more than 10 times greater in volume than Niagara Falls. *Vice News* [Read more](#)

September 23 - Concern About Oil Spills In Inland Northwest Rises With Rail Traffic

The coast has generally been considered the area of the Northwest most at risk for a catastrophic oil spill. But the rise in oil moving through the region by rail has raised the stakes for some inland areas. Three counties in the northern tip of Idaho are now creating their own strategy for containing an oil spill.

NEWS REPORTS FROM USA (Continued)

Trains carry crude oil from North Dakota across the Idaho Panhandle at least twice a day. They run along lakes and rivers, and sometimes cross right over the water. That's made local emergency response managers in Boundary, Bonner and Kootenai counties even more nervous about what would happen if a train derailed. *KPLU88.5* [Read more](#)

September 24 - U.S. judge rejects BP bid to recoup some payments made for spill

BP Plc cannot recoup what it says were inflated claims paid under a multi-billion dollar settlement programme to compensate people hurt by the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, a U.S. judge ruled on Wednesday. BP originally expected the payout programme to cost \$7.8 billion (5 billion pounds), but it has said the final bill, from the uncapped agreement that is handling thousands of claims, could be considerably higher.

The oil major has filed numerous motions to challenge what it says are excessive fees charged by the programme's administrator, generous payments made under disputed accounting rules, and phony claims. U.S. District Court Judge Carl Barbier in New Orleans has thrown out many of those complaints and turned the company down again on Wednesday. *Euronews* [Read more](#)

September 24 - Unalaska Hosts National Oil Spill Response Drill

Coast Guard crews and local stakeholders are playing out a major hypothetical disaster in Unalaska this week. It's part of a federal oil spill response drill that's taking place in the Aleutians for the first time.

The drill is based on a worst-case scenario: a 500,000-gallon oil spill in the waters around the island, after a hypothetical landslide above North Pacific Fuel's tank farm near Mt. Ballyhoo. For Capt. Paul Mehler, the Coast Guard's chief for Western Alaska and the Arctic, the drill is a chance for everyone the spill would impact to combine their individual response plans, and see what works. *KUCB* [Read more](#)

September 25 - Are we better prepared for big Cook Inlet spill?

Crude oil tankers and non crude fuel barges transit Cook Inlet all year round, and no one is prepared for a "worse case" scenario oil spill in Cook Inlet.

Subsequent to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, laws have been written, organizations created, and 25 years worth of meetings and stacks of paper and studies have gathered on shelves. Are we "readier for a spill" than we were in 1989? Yes. But not much readier. *Homer News* [Read more](#)

NEWS REPORTS FROM CANADA

September 19 - Oil spill boss sees improvements in federal preparedness

The man who would lead the response to a West Coast oil spill disaster, and who last year questioned federal leadership on the issue, says Ottawa is acting to resolve almost all of his concerns.

Kevin Gardner is president of Burnaby-based Western Canada Marine Response Corp., a private sector organization that since 1995 has been certified by Transport Canada to respond to Pacific coast spills. Gardner and one of his top executives delivered a critical behind-closed-doors assessment of Ottawa's performance on spill preparedness before a Harper government-appointed panel in June of 2013. *The Vancouver Sun* [Read more](#)

September 23 - Suncor to Ship First Ever Western Canadian Crude to Europe



Photo: MT Minerva Gloria file photo (c) MarineTraffic.com/allan.flood@comhem.se

Canada's largest oil and gas producer, Suncor Energy Inc, is shipping its first ever tanker of Western Canadian heavy crude from Canada's East Coast to Europe, a company spokeswoman said on Tuesday.

Suncor spokeswoman Sneh Seetal confirmed Reuters shipping data that shows the Aframax tanker Minerva Gloria was set to pick up a cargo of crude oil from the port of Sorel-Tracy on the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. Seetal declined to comment on where in Europe the crude cargo is going, citing commercial confidentiality. According to Reuters data it will be discharged in the Mediterranean *gCaptain* [Read more](#)

Other news reports from around the world (continued)

NEWS REPORTS FROM CANADA (Continued)

September 23 - Canada may spread oil-by-rail insurance burden, mulls special fund

The Canadian government is looking at extending the insurance burden for crude-by-rail disasters beyond just railways and is weighing the idea of special fund similar to one once set up for maritime oil spills, a government official said.

The potential policy move comes over a year after a runaway oil train exploded last July in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, leveling the heart of the town and killing 47 people. The cleanup and reconstruction bill, now being covered by governments, is expected to be at least \$400-million.

The country's Conservative government pledged last year to make railways carry more insurance to deal with such disasters, but is coming around to the idea that it is unrealistic for the industry to bear the entire cost, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak publicly. "It's not likely to be the railways alone," he said. *Financial Post* [Read more](#) [Thanks to Mike Rancilio, ISCO]

September 25 - Oil spill exercise tests Alberta pipeline companies' collaborative skills



Photo: Instructor for Western Canadian Spill Services, Doug Gibson works a weir skimmer with booms during a staged emergency management exercise, that was created by the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association and its member companies, at the Edmonton Expo Centre on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2014. The exercise is meant to prepare its workers for any potential oil spills. Photograph by: Ed Kaiser, Edmonton Journal

Employees from major Canadian pipeline companies worked together Wednesday to respond to a mock emergency — the mysterious release of 10,000 barrels of sweet crude oil into the North Saskatchewan River.

A conference room at Edmonton Northlands' Expo Centre became an active command post as 70 people — players and evaluators — worked on the daylong joint emergency management exercise.

The event, staged by the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, was a first for the industry. Nine months in the planning, it was designed to test CEPA's new mutual assistance agreement and to see how effectively companies can collaborate using a common incident command system. *Edmonton Journal* [Read more](#)

NEWS REPORTS FROM UK

September 24 - Port of Blyth joins Rio de Janeiro and Singapore as one of three sites to house oil spill response equipment

Photo: Port of Blyth Chief Executive Martin Lawlor

The Port of Blyth has been chosen as one of only three sites worldwide, including Rio de Janeiro and Singapore, to house specialist oil spill response equipment. Port chief executive Martin Lawlor said he was delighted to have attracted international operators Oil Spill Response Limited in establishing a base for their specialist clean up equipment.

The Southampton-based firm will station heavy hose reels of over 250 tonnes along with other equipment at Blyth, ready for rapid response to oil spillages anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. Oil Spill Response work alongside most of the world's top oil and gas firms, and Mr Lawlor was pleased the deal will put Blyth on the map with such operators. *The Journal* [Read more](#)



NEWS REPORTS FROM CAYMAN ISLANDS

September 22 - Oil spill vessel moved out of North Sound

It leaked an estimated 500 gallons of oil into the North Sound this May, and four months later, the broken-down dredger appears to no longer be an environmental threat. On Friday (19 September), crews towed the dredger into a notch dug to house it. Excavators built a land bridge, sequestering the vessel from the open water of the North Sound. The Department of Environment says the dredger will be disassembled and scrapped in its new location. *Cayman* [Read more](#)

Other news reports from around the world (continued)

NEWS REPORTS FROM NORWAY

September 24 - Oil Spill Preparedness Strengthened In Finnmark

Two new depots for oil clean-up equipment being opened at Hasvik and Måsøy in northern Norway represent important building blocks in emergency preparedness for the Goliat field in the Barents Sea. Due to become operational on 23 and 24 September respectively, these facilities provide western Finnmark county with an oil spill preparedness which is top-class in national terms.

The project has been implemented by the Norwegian Clean Seas Association for Operating Companies (Nofo) and the Goliat licence, which comprises Eni Norge and Statoil. Development of Goliat has greatly strengthened oil-spill preparedness along the Finnmark coast, and this has been specially tailored for local conditions. *The Maritime Executive* [Read more](#)

NEWS REPORTS FROM JAPAN

September 22 - Fukushima clean-up going painfully slow



Photo: Bags full of contaminated waste are piled up Sept. 10 at a temporary storage site in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, which has been evacuated since the nuclear crisis started in 2011. Buildings in the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant can be seen beyond. | KYODO

Three and a half years after Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station spewed massive amounts of radioactive materials into the air and water, decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture has yet to draw to an end.

The government initially hoped to complete the decontamination by the end of last March, but the process continues to lag far behind, prompting the government to push back the goal by three years to 2017.

Due to the slow progress, huge bags filled with contaminated soil can still be seen piled up at hundreds of temporary storage sites across the prefecture, and many residents are in limbo, unable to make up their minds about whether to return home in the near future or to relocate for good. *Japan Times* [Read more](#)

ISCO News

A MESSAGE FROM ISCO'S SECRETARY

Looking back at ISCO's International Forum on Group V (Non-buoyant) Oils I think it was a great success and a fitting way to celebrate the organizations 30th anniversary. The subject of the forum was particularly appropriate at a time when there is so much concern about the potential spill risks arising from the increased movement of oil sands products – dilbit and heated bitumen.

In the case of dilbit, there is a finite window – only a few days – during which currently available containment-recovery techniques for freshwater spills can be effective. As the diluent evaporates, the product will sink and the clean-up difficulties and costs escalate exponentially. As an example, the still continuing cost of dealing with the Kalamazoo pipeline spill is already in excess of a billion dollars.

Recovery of sunken oil and sub-surface suspensions is technically very difficult and time-consuming.

So far, the main focus has been on spills arising from pipeline failures and railcar derailments, but there are indications that barge transportation on lakes and inland waterways will soon become a significant cause for major concern.

With the news this week that the first cargo of oil sands product is being shipped to Europe (possibly to a Mediterranean destination), it can be seen that response to this type of oil will become an increasingly international problem.

At sea, spills of bitumen can form stable emulsions (not amenable to chemical dispersal). Weathering effects will include tarball formation, neutral buoyancy (sub-surface suspension in the water column) and sinking.

Quite rightly, pipeline, rail and shipping operators, together with insurers, government agencies and the public are deeply concerned. The Forum served a very useful purpose and was extremely well supported by government agencies and other interested parties. The quality of speakers was top class and I am very grateful to them and to everyone who contributed to the success of the event.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM LATIN AMERICA: FORTY YEARS AGO - THE METULA INCIDENT



An article contributed by ISCO Member, Carlos Sagrera, MISCO.

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION, ACTORS AND CONTEXT

The author has specialised in prevention and control of onshore and offshore spills in Latin America for 20 years. He is a retired LCDR (Uruguayan Navy, 1992) and graduated from the Chilean Naval Polytechnic Academy (1978).

Introduction

In 2014, rich in mythical anniversaries (including the 30 prolific years of ISCO), everyone talks about the 25th anniversary of Exxon Valdez, and rightly so. This incident deeply impacted the maritime and oil industries, and, above all, the regulatory states; therefore, it became and will forever be a mandatory reference in relation to oil spill control issues and their implications (e.g., OPA 90 and, later, IMO's OPRC).



Latin America also has its anniversaries, but they are not as highlighted as they should be. The VLCC Metula incident is one of those cases. It was an incident in cold water and weather conditions, previous to that of Exxon Valdez. Even earlier, the sinking of the Arrow in Nova Scotia (Canada), a previous and close in time incident that took place in the Americas, occurred, but we have to take into account that it was 25 times smaller in terms of oil spilled and environmental consequences. Why the lack of interest and absence of technical and scientific exchange about these incidents in Latin America? In the Metula¹ incident, we have to consider that even the closure of navigation through the Strait of Magellan was at risk. In that case, the vessels would have had to be veered to the dreaded Drake Passage, with the consequent danger and costs involved.² Answers may vary. The industry in developing countries does not help, because it prefers not to revive old demons by interpreting facts out of context, because this always generates negative

opinions on safety and environmental effects of its activities. Nor do environmental advocacy groups, which are still in the beginning stages and disorganized in Latin America (with certain exceptions, such as Brazil). These groups lack rigour and are too biased to give a rational interpretation of local incidents. As a corollary, it is not surprising that the media follows this same pattern and seldom investigates or mentions these past events that do not appeal to most readers in this time of immediacy and little reflection. However, some distinct progress could be pointed out in certain countries in recent years that enable them to pass some advanced environmental laws (e.g., Mexico). Notwithstanding, despite the exceptions, to change this general perception we must start by remembering and withholding our own lessons learned. It is interesting to reconstruct this case from our current perspective. Some documents that were classified then are available now, among them confidential telegrams from the U.S. Secretary of State during that pivotal era, Henry Kissinger.³

If 100 years later we are able to assimilate the facts of the disaster of the Titanic, which were so widely covered by the media and from which we still obtain transferable lessons learned, we should be able to assimilate the most recent lessons learned from disasters in our own backyard.

This paper aims to present a current and distinct approach to the Metula event, highlighting lessons learned for Latin America that are still valid. We have to remind the reader about the regional context: in 1974 Chile had latent topics and disputes on the Beagle Channel with neighbouring Argentina, and nationalist governments on both countries zealously nurtured all topics related to territorial sovereignty. Apart from the specific topic of the incident, it was probably not the best time for interacting among neighbours that were at the start of an arms race along the common border.⁴ Subsequent events in response to this incident demonstrated the need for co-operation between both countries in that inhospitable, particularly sensitive environment that required that maritime actions be taken by both countries in support of the salvage.

References

1 <http://ioscproceedings.org/doi/abs/10.7901/2169-3358-1999-1-1075>

2 From the day after the accident, Chilean naval authorities in the area restricted navigation for vessels over 80,000 tons and/or with a draft of more than 50 feet.

3 http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974STATE179876_b.html

4 Although it had no effect on the development of this incident, it is worth noting that in the nearby city of Punta Arenas, the main Chilean base in the South, curfew was in force until the early hours of the morning.

FORTY YEARS AGO - THE METULA INCIDENT (Continued)

Actors and Context

Forty years ago, in 1974, two Latin American countries—Chile and its Navy, as the directly affected side, and Argentina, with its Harvella tanker for specific supporting actions—were involved in an incident when the Metula went aground in the Strait of Magellan, in Chilean waters.⁵ The Chilean Navy had a pioneering role as Incident Commander. At that time this position was not even legally referenced as it is today. Chilean contingency plans were very elemental, at best. The Chilean Navy had few naval and air units stationed in the South at that time (the Lautaro tug, small patrol vessels, and DC-3 aircraft from the naval aviation), which would carry out crucial logistical tasks in the emergency.

Furthermore, the Chilean Navy would conduct support tasks through permanent forecasts presented by its efficient Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service⁶ and with other technicians in hull inspections and evaluations seeking to refloat the vessel, as well as permanent aerial surveillance. The Marines were assigned to observe the impact on the coast, which could be summarized as a primary location and quantification work of the affected coast, probably the collection of harmed wildlife and little else.⁷ These were the specific resources—all military- technicians—that were available in that inhospitable end of the world.

We must also add another country regarding this incident: The Netherlands. VLCC Metula was registered in an overseas territory of the Netherlands; its captain came from that country, as did the carrier and its subsidiaries. Even the salvage company would be the renowned SMIT of the same origin.⁸ It is also important to highlight the participation after the incident of several U.S. organisations, which were initially appointed as consultants by Chile and focused on requesting that the Coast Guard send a multidisciplinary task force to support this event.⁹ IMCO (now IMO) collaborated with an expert scientist from the first days after the accident. P&I Club representatives, especially TOVALOP's representative¹⁰, along with representatives from Shell—the shipowner and also involved in this event as carrier—had to deal with the responsibilities and would maximize their efforts towards one primary purpose: the salvage and moving away of the vessel from the site of the incident as soon as possible.

This display of so many actors came about because there was no precedent of a disaster of such magnitude and in such extreme conditions. An estimated crude oil spill of 51,500 tons during the first days and another 2,000 tons of bunker C from a fuel tank, totalled more than 17,000 tons spilled in excess of the Exxon Valdez incident that took place 15 years later in Alaskan waters and was widely covered by the media. Comparing these two cases is not irrelevant: they both occurred in cold waters and extremely sensitive ecosystems, in sparsely populated areas, in comparable latitudes in the northern and southern hemispheres with minimal evaporation rates, and the product spilled was highly persistent and harmful to the environment. In both cases human errors made by the crew, and specifically by the officers, were decisive for the occurrence of the incident. It is paradoxical that while in such places there could be adverse weather conditions at certain times, when these events occurred the sea and winds were calm and visibility was normal and within the range expected for the evening hours during which both incidents took place. Engines and navigation equipment were working perfectly. However, there are some differences regarding response. In the Exxon Valdez incident indigenous populations were concerned, while in the Tierra del Fuego incident the nearby original population had been extinct for almost a century. Perhaps for that reason in the case of Exxon Valdez the largest coast treatment effort ever deployed to that date was carried out, while in the Metula case the response strategy selected was limited to discontinuous monitoring and subsequent sporadic assessment by scientific missions. After the first month of uncertainty and role clarification the missions started; they included scientists from Instituto de la Patagonia in Punta Arenas (a protagonist from the start of the incident) and University of Chile, and sponsorship by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that visualized the opportunity and potential scientific yield of the situation.¹¹

To illustrate how environmental issues were handled in those days, a year earlier—in June 1973—the Napier tanker ran aground in the Aysen area (Guamblin Island), also in Chile. The result was a 30,000 ton crude oil spill. After an evaluation the authorities

References

- 5 Schwarz, Jorge - El Caso Metula (The Metula Case), Edit. Instituto de Publicaciones Navales, Buenos Aires, 1978. This publication regarding Argentina's participation in the incident is recommended. The author was an Expert Senior Officer of the Argentine Navy who was directly involved in the operation, advising Argentine authorities on matters related to oil spill pollution. His story narrates the situation using fictitious names for its characters; it portrays the entire sequence of events and the actual operations performed for the Metula salvage, and it is a unique testimony about the circumstances experienced. Although the author did not venture opinion on the substantive reasons that caused the incident, he collected all the information available thus far from scientific reports, leaving no doubt about the extent of the damage done to ecosystems in the area. Even today it is a unique case in Latin America: the story is told by a protagonist in a maritime incident with oil spill consequences.
- 6 The Chilean Navy's Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service (SHOA, for its acronym in Spanish), has a well-earned reputation in Chile and among its peers throughout Latin America for the efficiency of its professionals and the quality and accuracy of its hydrographic and oceanographic publications. <http://www.shoa.cl/index.htm>
- 7 <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CZIC-td195-p4-g86-1976/html/CZIC-td195-p4-g86-1976.htm>
- 8 Schwarz, Jorge - El Caso Metula, Chapter V, pp. 35-40 - Edit. Instituto de Publicaciones Navales, Buenos Aires, 1978. It is important to remark that the book emphasises the salvage of the vessel with technical considerations that reflect a direct source of information from the Dutch company.
- 9 Ibid. Chapter VII, pp. 48-52. The U.S. had the Coast Guard's National Strike Force available at that time. It was the organization in charge of oil spill pollution control activities under the Clean Water Act (1972). When the incident occurred, Chile requested information from the U.S. government. Six days after the incident the Coast Guard sent a member of this specialized group as the first observer, and he provided advice to the Chilean naval command in charge of the disaster area during the following weeks.
- 10 TOVALOP – Tanker Owners Voluntary Agreement concerning Liability for Oil Pollution. It applied between 1969 and 1997 and it was the reason for the creation of the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation (ITOPF).
- 11 <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CZIC-td195-p4-g86-1976/html/CZIC-td195-p4-g86-1976.htm>

FORTY YEARS AGO - THE METULA INCIDENT (Continued)

decided that the Chilean Air Force would fire rockets upon the ship to burn and eliminate the spilled oil. The decision was consensual and had the scientific support of the Catholic University of Chile.¹² This decision should not come as a surprise: six years before the same procedure had been carried out with Torrey Canyon, albeit with several questions asked in the UK about the validity of that strategy.

Regarding Metula, it was a long 19 days after the event that the first flight departed to get a detailed initial assessment. The flight was staffed by personnel from Chile's Instituto de la Patagonia, Texas A&M (member of the U.S. task force sponsored by the Coast Guard and the Department of Transportation) and IMCO.¹³ The odd thing was that this was not directly supported by the Chile's Navy or Air Force so it was necessary to get a small private plane to perform this crucial valuation flight with renowned experts. The foreign experts went on board naval reconnaissance aircraft for the first time 25 days after the event, when the magnitude of the environmental catastrophe had probably been sized by the Naval Command in Valparaiso and government authorities in Santiago. It was in January 1975 that a joint science mission took place, including experts from Chile and the U.S. (NOAA, EPA, and the Coast Guard), to assess the effects on marine life and intertidal zones. New scientific assessments were performed by the U.S. a year later to find out the effects of oil weathering and environmental impacts on ecosystems. That incident would debunk the myth that oil was likely to disappear in the Atlantic Ocean or even the belief that the damage had been done and the constant tides would clean the coasts. The scarcity and lack of basic scientific information was evidenced by these actions.

References

12 <http://rescateinternacionalchile.blogspot.com/2010/10/derrame-de-petroleo-y-posterior-rescate.html>

13 <https://www.princeton.edu/~ota/disk3/1975/7508/750815.PDF>

To be continued next week

Publications

IOSC 2014 PROCEEDINGS NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

Message received from Greg Hall on 25 September – “It is with great excitement that we announce the availability of the 2014 IOSC Online Proceedings. As many of you know, several years ago IOSC undertook a project to move the entire text of the IOSC Proceedings, since the inception in 1969, into an electronic format which is now available online to anyone for free. Each article and poster in the collection has its own electronic identity and can be cited and searched for through online databases. The 2014 edition represents the first time we have engineered the online Proceedings into the fabric of the conference from the beginning of the planning process”.

To view the online proceedings click [here](#).

“In addition to viewing the online proceedings please make sure to check out our recap video of the 2014 International Oil Spill Conference (IOSC)! This video captures a series of interviews with participants talking about the value, importance and evolution of the IOSC over the years. It also highlights the advancements in oil spill technology, the spill response community that it supports, and IOSC's global reach and impact. That video can be viewed [here](#).” [Read the complete text of this announcement from IOSC](#)

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Events

IMO: MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

The 67th meeting of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 67) will be held in London over 13-17 October 2014. ISCO will be represented by Dr Douglas Cormack, Hon.FISCO.

PHILIPPINES: NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING WORKSHOP

Manila, 29/09/14 - 02/10/14. [More info](#)

ITALY: MEDITERRANEAN DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR MARINE SAFETY

A sub-regional end-user meeting for Central Mediterranean, Adriatic and Balkan areas will be organized on 9th of October 2014 at CNR Headquarter in Rome. [More info](#)

Company News

ISCO CORPORATE MEMBER, MARINE POLLUTION CONTROL CORP. PARTICIPATES IN TWO MAJOR OIL SPILL EXERCISES

Executive Vice-President Jeff Taylor advises that MPC participated in two major oil spill exercises last week, one vessel and one pipeline, for Sea River Maritime in Alaska, and for Enbridge in Michigan.

ISCO CORPORATE MEMBER, LAMOR CORP. HOLDS NEARSHORE WORKSHOP AND EQUIPMENT DEMO DAYS



On September 10-11, 2014 Lamor Corporation organized a Workshop and Equipment Demonstration for nearshore operations for over 100 participants from 26 countries from around the world: Australia, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad, Turkey, UK and USA.

A panel of distinguished experts in oil spill response and recovery at the event was chaired by the European Maritime Safety Agency's (EMSA) Victor Diaz Seco, Head of Section – Response Assistance Pollution Response Services Unit. Other panel members were Jan Fälteke, Swedish Coastguard (SKB), Kalervo Jolma, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and Nick Quinn, Australian Marine Oil Spill Center (AMOSC). [Read more](#)

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