



Oil Spills First Principles: Prevention and Best Response

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Marine oil spills are no longer considered unavoidable "accidents" resulting from adverse environmental conditions or functions of catastrophic events. More than 80% of all spills are the result of "human error". The focus of the current legal, regulatory, and convention framework affecting the transportation of oil by ship reflects a recent change in public attitude, in which there is an insistence upon protection of the world's marine environments, particularly coastal ecosystems. The outcome of such global attention is the creation of significant legal and political motivators for a cultural shift by the oil shipping industry, from an "evasion culture" to a "safety culture". The new safety culture connotes continuous improvement in ship operations and a willingness to adopt the evolving concepts of communication at all levels, better trained and qualified personnel on board ship, emphasis of safety from top down, and proactive institution of safety management systems. Mere compliance with international and national laws is no longer sufficient for future sustainable shipping. These changes and advancements in understanding the science and engineering of oil spills are the focus of this book on Oil Spills First Principles. They are Prevention, based upon adoption of the safety culture, and Best Response, utilizing scientific, technical and environmental data and information.

Over the past 30 years, billions of US dollars have been spent in R&D planning, response and clean up of oil spills. All of these efforts have focused on achieving Best Response. The concept of time periods of "Technology Windows-of-Opportunity" for a given response and clean up technology has developed from the leadership and wisdom of researchers and responders from many nations using modeling of the weathering of spilled oil and technology effectiveness. The Windows-of-Opportunity strategy provides a scientific basis for policy and decision-making in oil spill planning, response, and training.

A global paradigm shift is needed to more effectively utilize and expedite the application of lessons learned in both prevention and clean up. Recognition of economic, political, and legal benefits accruing from environmental protection is good for business and critical for sustainable shipping.

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Luis Ray:

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