

WIDER CARIBBEAN



The Wider Caribbean is the most complex and varied of the Regional Seas, with 28 states and territories, including islands under the jurisdiction of France, the Netherlands, UK and USA. The region encompasses both tropical and sub-tropical ecosystems, from coral reefs to mangrove forests and seagrass beds, each with its unique wildlife. For the island states, tourism is of particular importance, with the increasing number of visitors per annum often outstripping the growing resident population. The pressures on the coastal environment are correspondingly great and the ongoing depletion of the region's natural resources has accelerated in recent years.

THE RISK OF OIL SPILLS

The Wider Caribbean is a major oil producing area. Venezuela holds the western hemisphere's largest oil reserves and one of its largest refining systems. As at 2002, Mexico and Venezuela ranked respectively as the 4th and 8th largest oil producers in the world. The US Gulf coast, Colombia and Trinidad & Tobago are also prominent oil producing areas. A part of the substantial oil production in the region emanates from offshore installations, with some 143 platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and 13 off Trinidad. A few offshore platforms are also located on the Saba Bank, near St Croix and Anguilla.

Most of the oil produced within the Wider Caribbean region is shipped within the region resulting in an intricate network of distribution routes. The movement of oil is dominated by crude oil and oil product imports to the USA. However, with the exception of the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP), there are no deep-water ports on the US Gulf coast. Many laden deep-draft tankers therefore head for lightening areas off the Cayman Islands and a few other transfer points. Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles (Curacao & St. Eustatius) are centres for both crude oil trans-shipment and refining.

With oil production and transport comes the risk of oil spills. The main risk areas for ship-source spills are centred on a dozen passages where the density of traffic is particularly high. The busiest sea lanes are through the Yucatan Channel, the Bahamas Channel and the Florida Strait. The Panama Canal also carries some oil product traffic, albeit in smaller shipments. In the central part of the Caribbean, the Mona Passage east of Puerto Rico is a busy route, along with other passages through the Lesser Antilles.

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Historically, the US Gulf Coast, Puerto Rico and Venezuela emerge as the areas with the highest incidence of ship-source oil spills. The majority of smaller spills have occurred during loading and unloading operations at terminals, whilst groundings and collisions account for most of the larger incidents. The world's largest ever tanker spill occurred in this region in 1979 when the AEGEAN CAPTAIN collided with another supertanker, the ATLANTIC EMPRESS, off Trinidad & Tobago, resulting in the death of 29 of her 34-man crew and the loss of 287,000 tonnes of crude oil. A summary of major tanker spills since 1974 is provided below. There have also been a number of exploratory and production-related spills in the region, including the largest spillage from a single source ever recorded worldwide. In June 1979 the PEMEX exploratory well IXTOC I blew out in Bahia del Campeche, Mexico, spilling over 470,000 tonnes of oil over the course of 295 days.

Major tanker spills of over 5,000 tonnes in the Caribbean since 1974

Vessel Name	Quantity spilled		Country	Year	Cause
	(tonnes)	(Type)			
ATLANTIC EMPRESS	287,000	CRUDE	LESSER ANTILLES	1979	COLLISION
EPIC COLOCOTRONIS	60,000	CRUDE	LESSER ANTILLES	1975	FIRE/EXPLOSION
BURMAH AGATE	36,000	CRUDE	USA	1979	COLLISION
SCORPIO	32,000	CRUDE	MEXICO	1976	GROUNDING
CYS DIGNITY	16,000	CRUDE	VENEZUELA	1979	GROUNDING
LSCO PETROCHEM	16,000	FUEL OIL (cargo)	USA	1976	GROUNDING
AEGEAN CAPTAIN	14,000	CRUDE	LESSER ANTILLES	1979	COLLISION
OSWEGO TARMAC	11,000	BITUMEN	LESSER ANTILLES	1977	COLLISION
ALVENUS	8,500	CRUDE	USA	1984	GROUNDING
PRINCESS ANNE MARIE	6,500	CRUDE	CUBA	1980	GROUNDING
MASTER MICHAEL	6,000	FUEL OIL (cargo)	Caribbean Sea	1979	
MEGA BORG	5,700	CRUDE	USA	1990	FIRE/EXPLOSION
ARKAS	5,000	CRUDE	USA	1982	COLLISION

Overall, because of the intense oil-related activities in the Region, and the sensitivity of the coastal environment, the Wider Caribbean is considered to be at high risk with regard to oil spills.

THE STATE OF PREPAREDNESS

Of the Region's 28 states and territories, 17 have prepared contingency plans (national and/or regional) and six others have national plans in draft form or in need of review. Most rely on local oil industry Tier 1 resources to be also pressed into service for spills away from industry installations. Those states and territories which are particularly vulnerable to spills appear to have extended their capabilities to cover Tier 2 incidents, either through the pooling of Tier 1 resources or through the acquisition of government-owned resources.

As at October 2003, the provisions of the OPRC Convention applied in 12 states and territories. Compliance with the objectives of the Convention has been mostly directed towards the acquisition of small equipment packages and/or reliance on oil industry resources. The Compensation Conventions have been ratified more widely, with just 8 states remaining without ratifications. Of these, two are under US jurisdiction and subject to the provisions of OPA 90.



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All islands are parties to a regional arrangement known as the Caribbean Islands OPRC Plan, allowing a regional approach and mutual assistance in the event of serious spills which exceed the response capability of individual governments or local oil industry. The Caribbean Islands OPRC Plan provides general criteria for oil pollution response, such as the use of dispersants, which may be applied when spill response policy is not otherwise specified in national contingency plans.

Under the auspices of IMO and UNEP, the 16 contracting parties to the Cartagena Convention have set up a Regional Activity Centre with the aim of assisting countries in implementing an Oil Spill Protocol. The Regional Marine Pollution Emergency, Information and Training Centre (RAC/REMPEITC-Carib), is located in Curaçao and acts as a focal point for disseminating information, facilitating training and exercises, and promoting oil spill preparedness. Other examples of sub-regional co-operation include ROCRAM, a network of marine authorities in South American countries, Cuba, Mexico and Panama.

The oil industry is active in South America and the Caribbean through ARPEL, a regional association of oil and natural gas companies, which organises conferences, publishes guidelines for contingency planning and provides a framework for calling upon advisers and spill response resources. Bilateral industry co-operative agreements exist between PEMEX (Mexico) and RECOPE (Costa Rica) and between PEMEX and US-based oil companies. PDVSA (Venezuela) has bilateral agreements with ECOPETROL (Colombia), NOCA (Netherlands Antilles) and with the government authorities of Trinidad and Tobago.

Other arrangements for assistance or co-operation in the Region include National Response Corporation (NRC), a US Tier 3 response contractor with stockpiles of equipment on St Lucia and the US Virgin Islands. A number of States and Islands will call upon their local oil industry to seek assistance and resources from the Clean Caribbean Co-operative (CCC), a Tier 3 centre based in Florida. Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and Bahamas are likely to call on assistance from the Caribbean Regional Response Team (CRRT) of the US Coast Guard.

In 1990 a network of marine laboratories was established for the purpose of distinguishing the impact of human activity on key coral reef, mangrove and seagrass areas against the background of natural variation in these environments. The programme named Caribbean Coastal Marine Productivity (CARICOMP) involves long-term monitoring of 25 sites in 16 countries of the Wider Caribbean Region.

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STATUS OF CONTINGENCY PLANS, TIERED RESOURCES AND CONVENTIONS

	Assigned National Authority	National Plan	Clean-up Resources		Cartagena Convention	Subregional Agreement	MARPOL	OPRC '90	LLMC '76	CLC '69 CLC '92	FUND '92	Inter-vention '69/'73
			Tier 1	Tier 2								
Anguilla (UK)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Ltd		Yes			Yes	'92	'92	'73
Antigua & Barbuda	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		'92	'92	
Aruba (NL.)	Yes	Yes	Ltd			Yes	Yes					'73
Bahamas	Yes	Yes	Ltd		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	'92	'92	'73
Barbados	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	'92	'92	'73
Belize		Draft	Yes		Yes		Yes			'92	'92	
British Virgin Islands	Yes	Yes	Ltd		Yes	Yes			Yes	'92	'92	'73
Cayman Is (UK)	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	'92	'92	'73
Colombia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			'92	'92	
Costa Rica		Draft	Ltd		Yes					'69		
Cuba	Yes	Yes	Ltd	Yes	Yes		Yes					'69
Dominica	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	'92	'92	
Dominican Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes			'92	'92	'69
French Antilles	Yes	Yes	Ltd	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		'92	'92	
French Guiana	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		'92	'92	
Grenada	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes					'92	'92	
Guatemala	Yes		Ltd		Yes		Yes			'69		
Guyana	Yes	Draft	Ltd				Yes	Yes	Yes	'69		'69
Haiti						Yes						
Honduras			Ltd		Yes		Yes			'69		
Jamaica	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		'92	'92	'73
Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	'92	'92	'73
Montserrat (UK)	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes			Yes	'92	'92	'73
Netherlands Antilles	Yes	Yes*	Yes			Yes	Yes					'73
Nicaragua	Yes	Review	Yes				Yes			'69		'73
Panama	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes			'92	'92	'69
Puerto Rico (USA)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes				'73
St Kitts & Nevis	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes			'69		
St Lucia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					
St Vincent & Grenadines	Yes	Draft	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes			'92	'92	'73
Suriname			Ltd				Yes					'69
Trinidad & Tobago	Yes	Review	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	'92	'92	'69
Turks & Caicos Is.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			Yes	'92	'92	'73
USA (Gulf Coast)*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes				'73
US Virgin Islands	Yes	Yes	Ltd		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				'73
Venezuela	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		'92	'92	

* some island plans in draft form

+ not formally part of the Wider Caribbean Region



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