

NORTH EAST PACIFIC



The North-east Pacific Region extends to approximately 78,000 km and covers 8 countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama. The Region is characterised by a variety of coastal and marine ecosystems and high biodiversity. There are mangrove swamps, rich fisheries grounds, aquaculture activities, as well as areas important to birds for nesting and breeding. These ecosystems are also of key economic significance, in terms of food and tourism. Furthermore, over 90% of the Central American population live on the Pacific side, therefore the Region is characterised by a high human impact on coastal areas. Land-based pollution is the primary cause of coastal ecosystem degradation. This arises from agricultural practises as well as from contamination from industrial plants.

RISK OF OIL SPILLS

Central America produces small quantities of crude oil. Some of this is sent to the US, but most is consumed locally. Nevertheless the region is an important shipping route for vessels travelling from Panama to Alaska, and oil is transported from Alaska to the east coast of America via the Panama Canal. The Canal is the hub for oil shipments; in 2001 a total of 613,000 bbl/d of crude oil and petroleum products were transported, which represents 57% of the total oil shipments (crude oil and petroleum products) moving from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The North-east Pacific region is considered a low risk area; historically only one major oil tanker accident (>5,000 tonnes) has been recorded.

Major tanker spills in the North East Pacific Region since 1974

Vessel Name	Quantity spilled (tonnes)	Country	Year	Cause
CARIBBEAN SEA	28,000	EL SALVADOR	1997	HULL FAILURE



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A total of 62 tanker accidents have been recorded since 1974, 60 of which involved less than 700 tonnes. Of the overall tanker accidents, 41 occurred in Panama (71% within the channel and 29% on the Pacific coast); these were mainly due to routine oil transfer operations such as discharging and bunkering, loading or as a result of low energy collisions and groundings. 15 tanker accidents occurred in Mexico, 2 in Colombia, 2 in El Salvador, 1 in Guatemala, and 1 in Honduras. They were caused by oil transfer operations such as discharging and loading.

THE STATE OF PREPAREDNESS

In 2002 a Convention and an Action Plan were developed for the North-East Pacific Region. The "Convention of Cooperation in the Protection of Sustainable Development of the Marine Coastal Environment of the North-east Pacific" was signed by six of the eight countries of the region in La Antigua, Guatemala. Contracting parties have agreed to adopt measures to avoid, prevent, reduce and control pollution of marine coastal environments, including countermeasures for pollution from shipping activities. Governments approved an Action Plan to improve environmental conditions in the region, envisaging several actions to tackle the different causes. This includes prevention and control of oil pollution and implies setting up national contingency plans to deal with accidental spills caused by oil exploration, production, transport and refining activities.

As at October 2003, only El Salvador and Mexico were party to the OPRC Convention whilst Colombia, Panama and Mexico were parties to the Fund Convention. All the countries in the region have ratified CLC '69 or '92.

Both Colombia and Mexico have national contingency plans to respond to oil spill accidents; also port specific and regional contingency plans are in place for these two countries. Panama is part of a regional contingency plan¹ which also covers Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile. The US Navy installations in the Canal have their own contingency plans. In Nicaragua the national contingency plan is in the process of review by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructures and IMO. Costa Rica has drafted a national contingency plan, whereas in El Salvador only the Exxon refinery at Acajutla has its own plan.

Colombia and Mexico own Tier 1 and 2 clean-up equipment and resources. In Colombia, most clean-up equipment belongs to the national oil company (ECOPETROL) and a small proportion to the Colombian Navy, which is the competent national authority for oil spill response. In Mexico booms, skimmers, skimming vessels, barges, dispersant spray vessels, and vacuum trucks are distributed between 17 Pacific Naval zones. Large stocks of private response equipment are also available from Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX). Panama has developed mainly Tier 1 capabilities for ports and adjacent coastal areas, but most of the equipment belongs to the Panama Canal Commission (PCC) and a small part to the National Port Authority (APN). In Nicaragua Tier 1 clean up equipment is provided by harbour administrations and by power stations. In Costa Rica the basic response equipment available is owned by the Costa Rican Coast Guard and by a private oil company (Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery, RECOPE). In Honduras and Guatemala limited resources are provided by coastal refineries whilst the Navy is the notification point for oil spills. In El Salvador the government does not hold specialised oil spill response equipment, but tugs are available for dispersant application.

The East Asia Response Limited (EARL) and Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) Alliance is the oil industry's Tier 3 response provider. It is wholly owned by 27 international oil companies and has links with the major response organisations. For the North-east Pacific the major oil industry base is the Marine Spill Response Cooperation.

In the Pacific, a number of operative networks for regional cooperation activities are in place, including ROCRAM (cooperation between Maritime Authorities of South America, Mexico, Panama and Cuba); the

¹ regional contingency plan from the Permanent Commission of the South Pacific (CPPS)



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Latin American Agreement on Port State Control of Vessels (Viña del Mar Agreement), which aims at coordinating measures to inspect foreign vessels calling at regional ports and enhance a closer cooperation among Maritime Authorities in the region (South American countries including Colombia, as well as Mexico, Panama and Honduras); the Quito Convention involving South Pacific States, Colombia included. The Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS) covers Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile and defines regional cooperation arrangements for this regional contingency plan, workshops and seminars.

STATUS OF CONTINGENCY PLANS, TIERED RESOURCES AND CONVENTIONS

	Assigned National Authority*	National Plan	Clean-up Resources		Antigua Convention (signed)	Regional Cooperations	MARPOL	OPRC '90	LLMC '76	CLC '69 CLC '92	FUND '92	Inter-vention '69/'73
			Tier 1	Tier 2								
Colombia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			'92	'92	
Costa Rica	Yes	Draft	Ltd		Yes					'69		
El Salvador	Yes				Yes		Yes			'92		
Guatemala	Yes		Ltd		Yes	Yes				'69		
Honduras	Yes				Yes	Yes				69		
Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	'92	'92	'73
Nicaragua	Yes	Review	Ltd		Yes	Yes				'69		'73
Panama	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes			'92	'92	'69

*- The Competent National Authority and the Oil Spill Notification Point are the same

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