Oil Tanker Spill Statistics 2025

ITOPF
PROMOTING EFFECTIVE SPILL RESPONSE

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Contents

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Introduction

ITOPF's annual Oil Tanker Spill Statistics publication presents data on accidental spills of oil from tankers. This includes incidents involving both persistent and non-persistent oil from tankers, except those resulting from acts of war. It provides information on oil spills recorded in the last year and an overview of the number and size of oil tanker spills since 1970.

Data is held on over 10,000 oil spills from tankers, including combined carriers, floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) units and barges. This includes the location and cause of the incident, the vessel involved, the type of oil spilt and the amount of oil spilt. Spills are categorised by size, ie small (<7 or 50 bbls), medium (7-700 tonnes or 50 to 5,000 bbls) or large (>700 tonnes or 5,000 bbls), although the actual amount spilt is also recorded.

Information is gathered from shipping and other specialist publications, as well as from vessel owners, their insurers and ITOPF's own experience at incidents. Historically, information from published sources related mostly to large spills, often resulting from collisions, groundings, structural damage, fire or explosions. In recent decades, the reporting of smaller spills has improved.

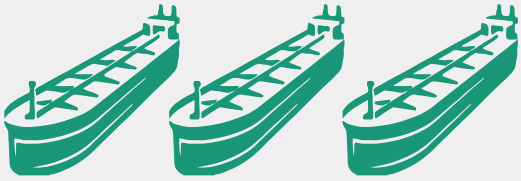
It should be noted that the estimate of the amount of oil spilt in an incident includes all oil lost to the environment, including that which burnt or remained in a sunken vessel. There is considerable annual variation in both the number of oil spills and the amount lost. While we strive to maintain precise records for all spill information, we cannot guarantee that the information taken from the shipping press and other sources is complete or accurate. The number of incidents and volumes of oil spilt are recorded based on the most up-to-date information available. Occasionally, data is received after publication and, in this case, adjustment to previous entries may be made. Consequently, the figures in the following tables, and any averages derived from them, should be viewed with a degree of caution.

It is also important to note that accidental spills from tankers account for only a small percentage of the oil that enters the oceans each year. Pipeline spills, oil industry activities, petroleum usage (including oil spills from non-tankers and 'run-off' from roads and other land-based sources), as well as natural seepage, all contribute towards annual inputs. Therefore, ITOPF's report shows only part of the picture relating to the global input of oil into the marine environment.

For further information on ITOPF's tanker spill statistics, please contact Naa Sackeyfio, Senior Data Analyst and GIS Specialist (naasackeyfio@itopf.org). We regret that it is not possible to provide direct access to our database or to release the names of individual tanker incidents.

FRONT COVER IMAGE: TANKER IN MOMBASA PORT, KENYA

Large spills
(>700 tonnes)



Medium spills
(7-700 tonnes)

Locations

Asia

Europe

4,000 tonnes of oil lost
from tanker accidents

Tanker Spills Recorded in 2025

Six oil spills over seven tonnes were recorded from tanker incidents in 2025. This brings the decade average to 7.2, which is a slight increase on the average for the 2010s, yet it marks a substantial decline from figures observed in previous decades.

Three out of the six reported incidents in 2025 led to spills exceeding 700 tonnes, which are designated as 'large' spills. These incidents involved spills of crude and fuel oil, occurring in Asia and Europe. The remaining three incidents, categorised as 'medium' spills, also involved spills of crude and fuel oil and occurred in Asia.

The total volume of oil lost to the environment from tanker spills in 2025 was approximately 4,000 tonnes.

ITOPF has recorded tanker spill statistics for over 50 years and in this time, despite some annual fluctuations, the number and volume of oil spills from tankers have dropped dramatically. These numbers are stabilising at a low level, with the reduction being driven by positive change from the shipping industry and supported by governments. The ongoing commitment to exploring and investing in ways to improve standards is reflected in the trends we see in the spill statistics.

Major Oil Spills in History

A summary of the 20 largest oil spills that have occurred since the TORREY CANYON in 1967 is given in Table 1 and their geographical locations are shown in Figure 1. It is of note that 19 of the 20 largest spills recorded occurred before the year 2000. SANCHI, the most recent addition to the top 20, is the only major spill of non-persistent oil featured here and it resulted in significantly lower environmental impacts compared to some crude oil spills listed. A number of these incidents, despite their large size, necessitated little or no response as the oil was spilt some distance offshore and did not impact coastlines. PRESTIGE, EXXON VALDEZ and HEBEI SPIRIT are included for comparison.

POSITION	NAME OF SHIP	YEAR	LOCATION	SPILL SIZE (TONNES)
1	ATLANTIC EMPRESS	1979	OFF TOBAGO, WEST INDIES	287,000
2	ABT SUMMER	1991	700 NAUTICAL MILES OFF ANGOLA	260,000
3	CASTILLO DE BELLVER	1983	OFF SALDANHA BAY, SOUTH AFRICA	252,000
4	AMOCO CADIZ	1978	OFF BRITTANY, FRANCE	223,000
5	HAVEN	1991	GENOA, ITALY	144,000
6	ODYSSEY	1988	700 NAUTICAL MILES OFF NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA	132,000
7	TORREY CANYON	1967	SCILLY ISLES, UK	119,000
8	SEA STAR	1972	GULF OF OMAN	115,000
9	SANCHI*	2018	OFF SHANGHAI, CHINA	113,000
10	IRENES SERENADE	1980	NAVARINO BAY, GREECE	100,000
11	URQUIOLA	1976	LA CORUNA, SPAIN	100,000
12	HAWAIIAN PATRIOT	1977	300 NAUTICAL MILES OFF HONOLULU	95,000
13	INDEPENDENTA	1979	BOSPHORUS, TURKEY	95,000
14	JAKOB MAERSK	1975	OPORTO, PORTUGAL	88,000
15	BRAER	1993	SHETLAND ISLANDS, UK	85,000
16	AEGEAN SEA	1992	LA CORUNA, SPAIN	74,000
17	SEA EMPRESS	1996	MILFORD HAVEN, UK	72,000
18	KHARK 5	1989	120 NAUTICAL MILES OFF ATLANTIC COAST OF MOROCCO	70,000
19	NOVA	1985	OFF KHARG ISLAND, GULF OF IRAN	70,000
20	KATINA P	1992	OFF MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE	67,000
21	PRESTIGE+	2002	OFF GALICIA, SPAIN	63,000
36	EXXON VALDEZ+	1989	PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, ALASKA, USA	37,000
132	HEBEI SPIRIT+	2007	OFF TAEAN, SOUTH KOREA	11,000

TABLE 1: MAJOR TANKER SPILLS SINCE 1967

** The only spill of non-persistent oil*
+ Included for comparison

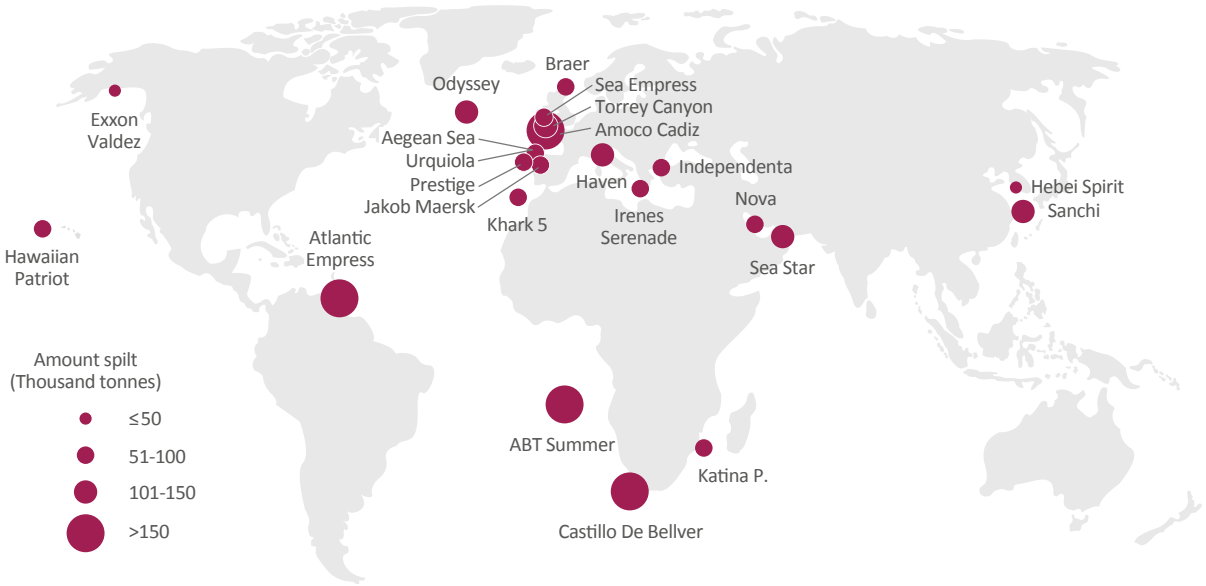


FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF TOP 20 MAJOR TANKER SPILLS

Number of Oil Spills

The number of oil spills from tankers has decreased significantly over the last five decades. Spills of seven tonnes and over have reduced by over 90% since the 1970s. There has however been little change in the last decade.

1970s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
1970	7	29
1971	18	14
1972	48	27
1973	28	31
1974	90	27
1975	96	20
1976	67	26
1977	70	16
1978	59	23
1979	60	32
TOTAL	543	245
AVERAGE	54.3	24.5

2000s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
2000	21	4
2001	18	3
2002	11	3
2003	19	4
2004	20	5
2005	22	3
2006	12	4
2007	12	3
2008	7	1
2009	7	2
TOTAL	149	32
AVERAGE	14.9	3.2

1980s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
1980	52	13
1981	54	7
1982	46	4
1983	52	13
1984	26	8
1985	33	8
1986	27	7
1987	27	11
1988	11	10
1989	32	13
TOTAL	360	94
AVERAGE	36	9.4

2010s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
2010	5	4
2011	4	1
2012	7	0
2013	5	3
2014	4	1
2015	6	2
2016	4	1
2017	4	2
2018	4	3
2019	2	1
TOTAL	45	18
AVERAGE	4.5	1.8

1990s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
1990	50	14
1991	30	7
1992	31	10
1993	31	11
1994	26	9
1995	20	3
1996	20	3
1997	28	10
1998	25	5
1999	20	5
TOTAL	281	77
AVERAGE	28.1	7.7

2020s

YEAR	7-700 TONNES	>700 TONNES
2020	4	0
2021	5	1
2022	4	3
2023	9	1
2024	4	6
2025	3	3
TOTAL	29	14
AVERAGE	4.8	2.3

TABLE 2: ANNUAL NUMBER OF OIL SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) FROM TANKERS

Quantity of Oil Spilt

From 1970 to 2025, approximately 5.9 million tonnes of oil was lost as a result of tanker incidents globally. However, there has been a significant reduction in the volume of oil spilt through the decades. Currently, the volume of oil lost in accidents is a tiny fraction of the volume that is delivered safely to its destination each year.

1970s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
1970	383,000
1971	144,000
1972	313,000
1973	159,000
1974	174,000
1975	352,000
1976	365,000
1977	276,000
1978	393,000
1979	636,000
TOTAL	3,195,000

2000s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
2000	14,000
2001	9,000
2002	66,000
2003	43,000
2004	17,000
2005	15,000
2006	12,000
2007	15,000
2008	2,000
2009	3,000
TOTAL	196,000

1980s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
1980	206,000
1981	48,000
1982	12,000
1983	384,000
1984	29,000
1985	85,000
1986	19,000
1987	38,000
1988	190,000
1989	164,000
TOTAL	1,175,000

2010s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
2010	12,000
2011	2,000
2012	1,000
2013	7,000
2014	5,000
2015	7,000
2016	6,000
2017	7,000
2018	116,000
2019	1,000
TOTAL	164,000

1990s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
1990	61,000
1991	431,000
1992	167,000
1993	140,000
1994	130,000
1995	12,000
1996	80,000
1997	72,000
1998	13,000
1999	28,000
TOTAL	1,134,000

2020s

YEAR	QUANTITY (TONNES)
2020	1,000
2021	10,000
2022	15,000
2023	2,000
2024	10,000
2025	4,000
TOTAL	42,000

TABLE 3: ANNUAL QUANTITY OF OIL SPILT (≥7 TONNES, ROUNDED TO THE NEAREST THOUSAND) FROM TANKERS

Global Oil Spill Trend

Over the past half a century, statistics for the frequency of spills of seven tonnes and over from tankers have shown a marked downward trend. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, the average number of spills per year in the 1970s was about 79 and decreased by over 90% to 6.3 in the 2010s. So far in the 2020s, the annual average number of oil spills is 7.2.

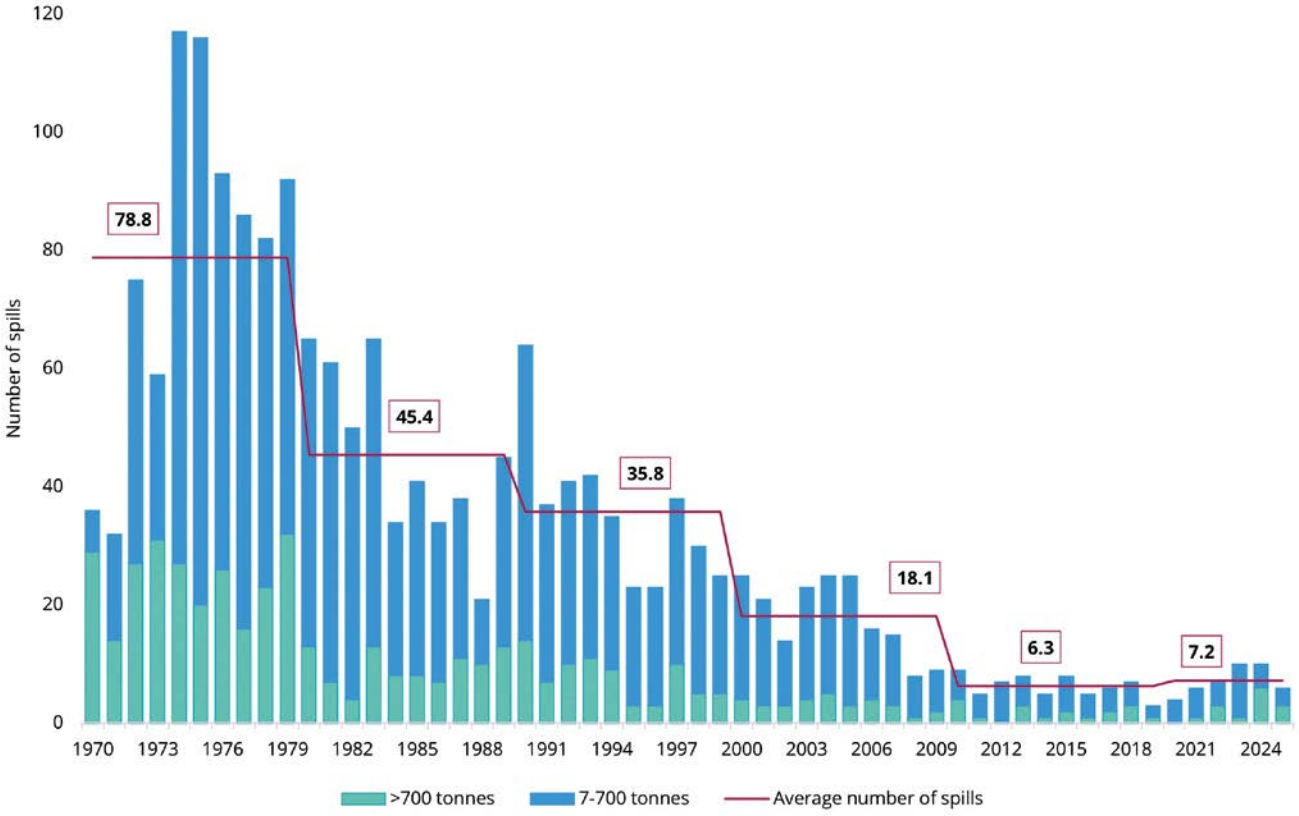


FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF MEDIUM (7-700 TONNES) AND LARGE (>700 TONNES) TANKER SPILLS, 1970-2025

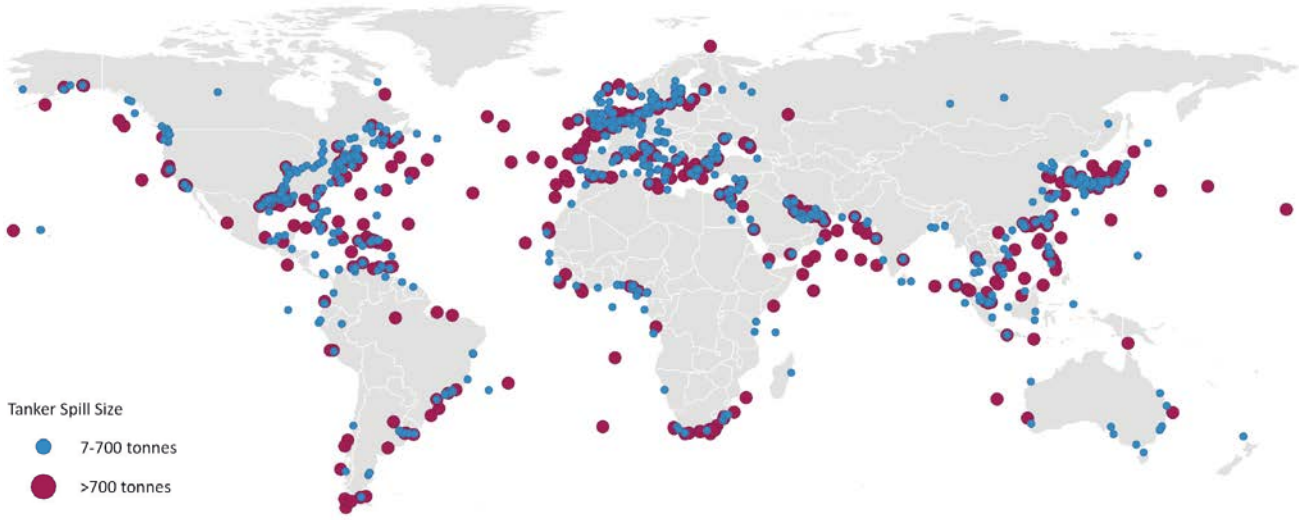
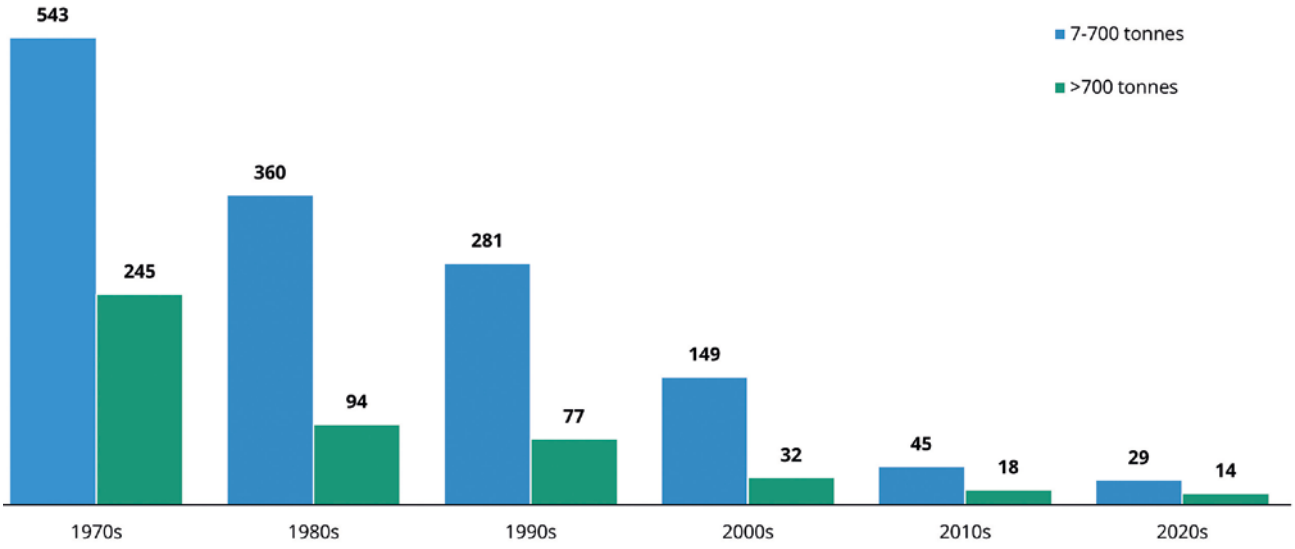


FIGURE 3: MAP OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES), 1970-2025

Spill Frequency Analysis

Data on spills of seven tonnes and over has been analysed to identify trends and reveal patterns in reported oil spills. Unfortunately, data on small spills (<7 tonnes), which forms over 80% of spills recorded since 1970, has been excluded. Information on this category of spills is often incomplete, thus reliable reporting is difficult to achieve.

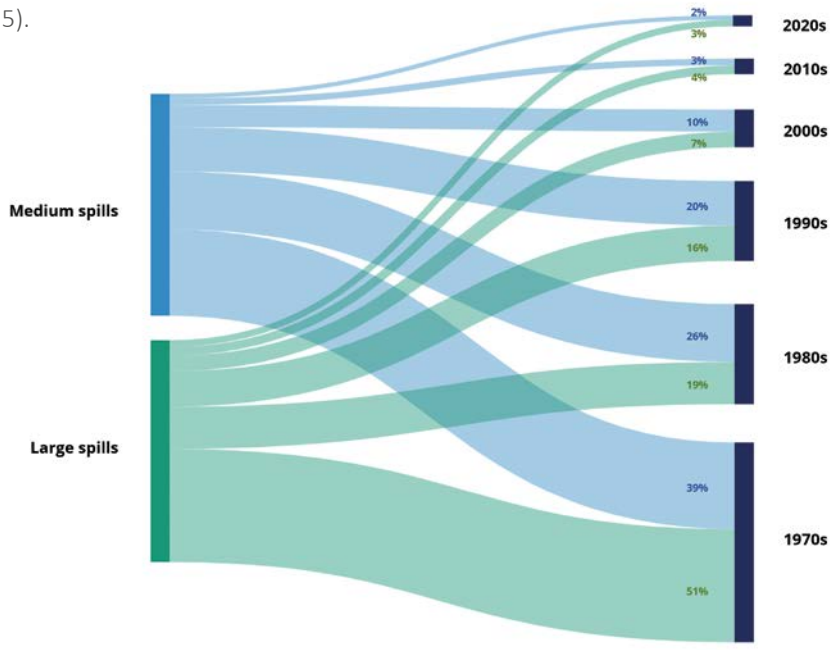
The number of large (>700 tonnes) and medium (7-700 tonnes) spills has decreased significantly over the past 56 years, as shown in Figure 4. The annual average number of spills recorded in the 2020s is less than a tenth of the average recorded in the decade 1970-1979, for both spill size classes. There has, however, been little change since the 2010s, with numbers stabilising at a low level. It is also interesting to note that the progressive reduction in the number of spills over the last few decades is significant when data is analysed per decade. Data recorded from 1970 to 2025 illustrates fluctuations in the yearly values within a decade (Figure 2).



** Only six years of data available for the 2020s*

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF MEDIUM (7-700 TONNES) AND LARGE (>700 TONNES) TANKER SPILLS, 1970-2025

A quarter of all recorded spills of seven tonnes and over are large. More than half of these (51%) occurred in the 1970s (Figure 5).



** Only six years of data available for the 2020s*

FIGURE 5: MEDIUM (7-700 TONNES) AND LARGE (>700 TONNES) TANKER SPILLS AS A PERCENTAGE OF THOSE RECORDED PER DECADE, 1970-2025

Spill Quantity Analysis

In terms of the volume of oil spilt, the figures for a particular year may be severely distorted by a single large incident, as illustrated below (Figure 6).

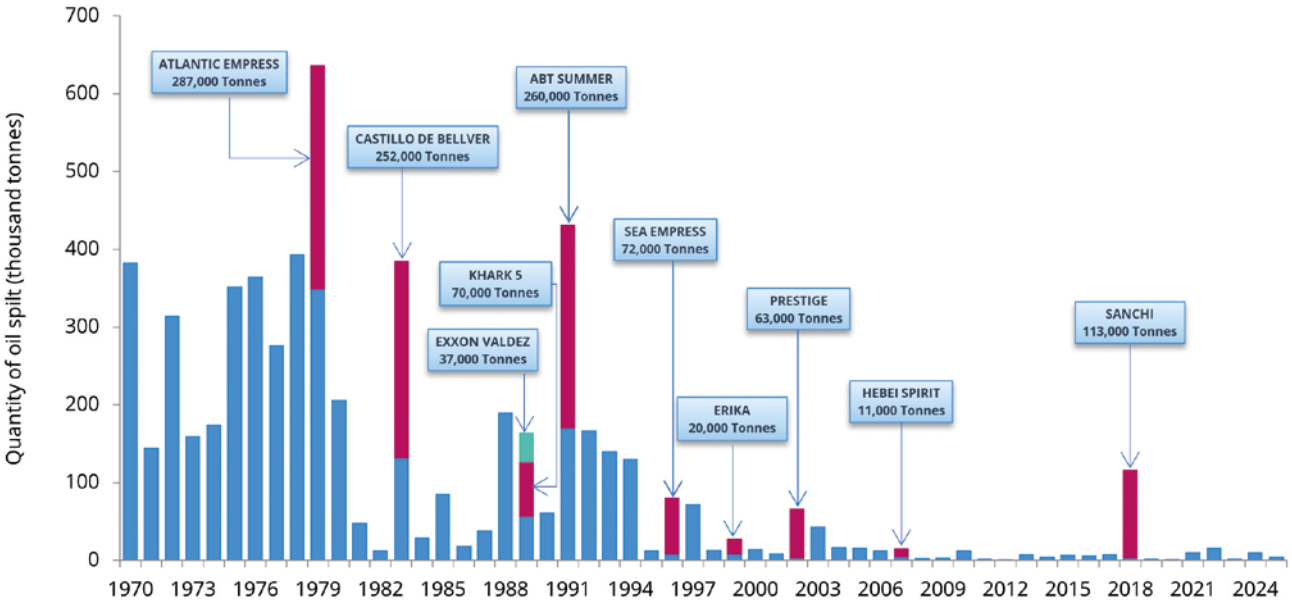
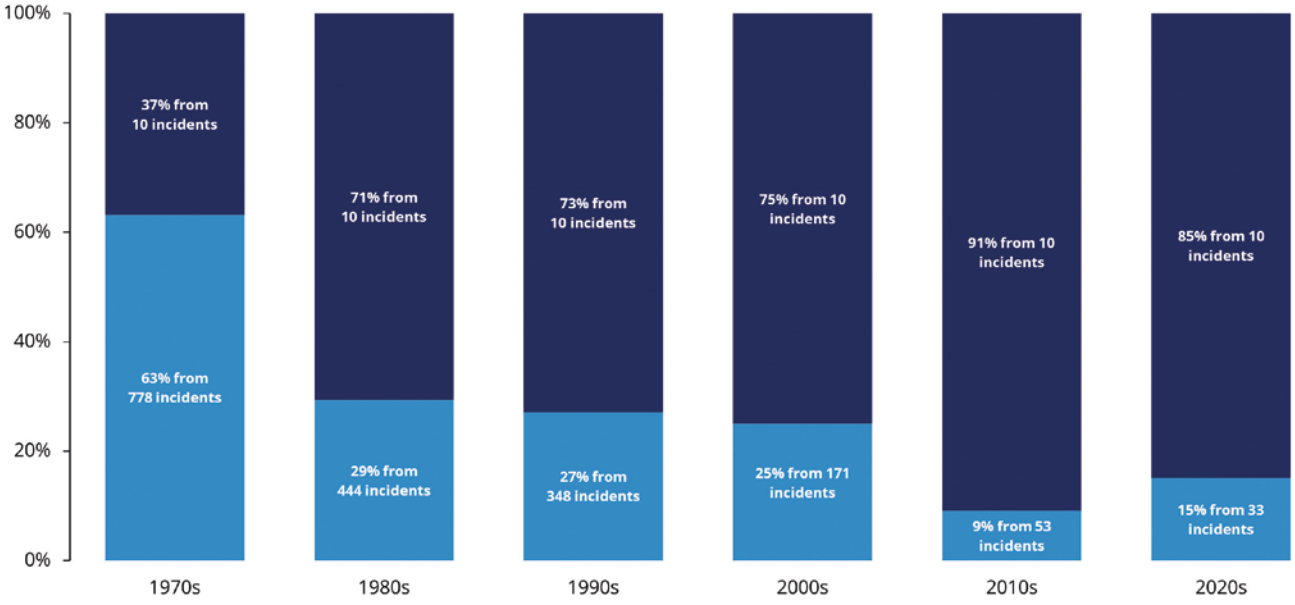


FIGURE 6: QUANTITIES OF OIL SPILT (≥7 TONNES, ROUNDED TO THE NEAREST THOUSAND) FROM TANKERS, 1970-2025

Figure 7 below also demonstrates the influence of a few very large spills on the estimated quantities of oil spilt. The following can be seen for recent decades:

- In the 1990s, there were 358 spills of seven tonnes and over, resulting in 1,134,000 tonnes of oil lost; 73% of this amount was spilt in just 10 incidents.
- In the 2000s, there were 181 spills of seven tonnes and over, resulting in 196,000 tonnes of oil lost; 75% of this amount was spilt in just 10 incidents.
- In the 2010s, there were 63 spills of seven tonnes and over, resulting in 164,000 tonnes of oil lost; 91% of this amount was spilt in just 10 incidents. One incident was responsible for about 70% of the quantity of oil spilt.
- In the 2020s to date, there have been 43 spills of seven tonnes and over, resulting in 42,000 tonnes of oil lost. 85% of this amount can be attributed to 10 large incidents and 15% to the remaining 33 incidents.

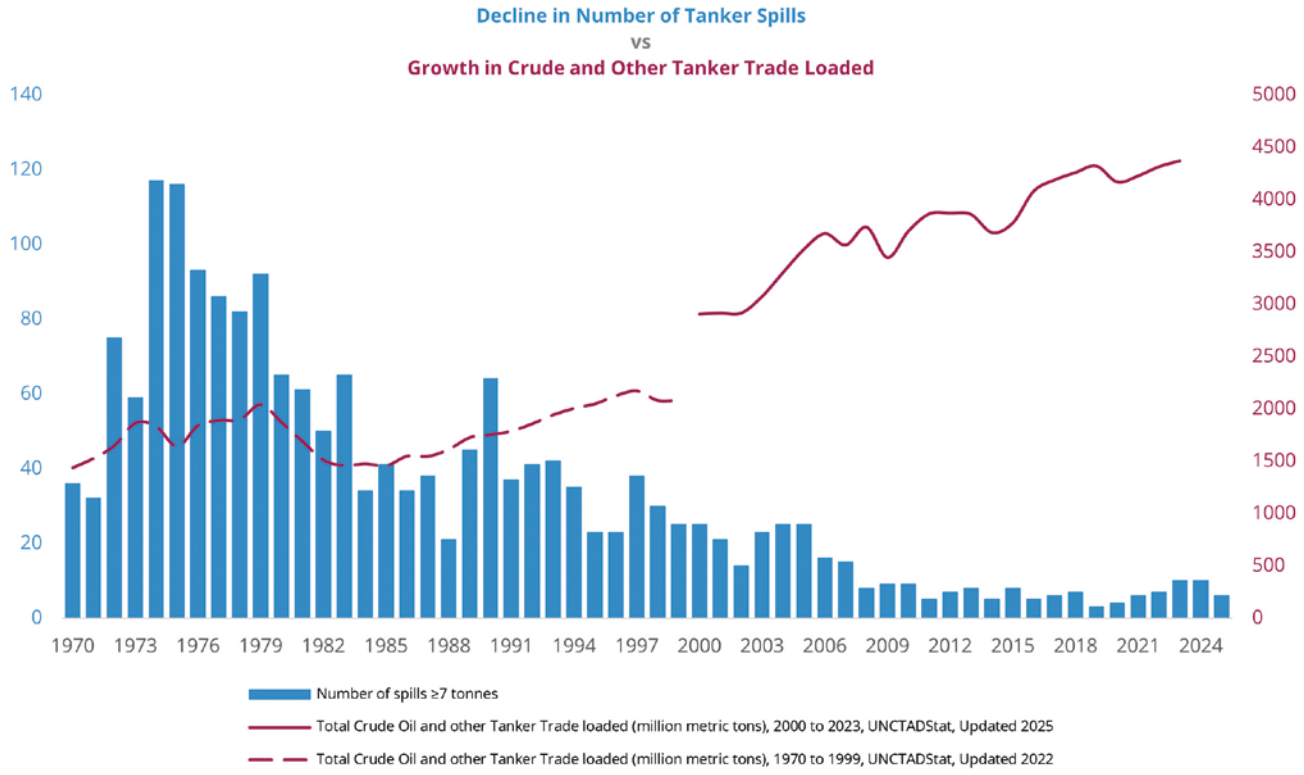


** Only six years of data available for the 2020s*

FIGURE 7: TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) PER DECADE SHOWING THE INFLUENCE OF A RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBER OF COMPARATIVELY LARGE SPILLS ON THE OVERALL FIGURE

Tanker Spills versus Seaborne Oil Trade

Since the 1970s, international seaborne oil trade has demonstrated consistent growth, except for a decline during the global economic recession in the early 1980s (see Figure 8). According to recent UN Trade and Development Statistics since 2000, this upward trend has continued, though annual volumes have fluctuated. Despite the overall increase in oil trading volumes, the incidence of oil spills has steadily decreased. Currently, more than 99.99% of oil transported by sea reaches its intended destination safely.



** UNCTADStat data is from two datasets and only available up to 2023*

FIGURE 8: DECLINE IN NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS VS GROWTH IN CRUDE AND OTHER TANKER TRADE LOADED, 1970-2025

Causes of Spills

The causes and circumstances of oil spills are varied, and their analyses provide valuable insights for managing risk. This information is, however, difficult to obtain as data is sometimes inconsistent or not available, particularly for small spills.

For this analysis, the primary causes of oil spills of seven tonnes and over have been grouped into allisions/collisions, groundings, hull failures, equipment failures, fires and explosions, other and unknown. Events such as heavy weather damage and human error have been categorised as 'other' and spills where the relevant information is not available have been designated as 'unknown' and are reported but excluded from the analysis. Figure 9, below, provides an overview of the causes by size of spill.

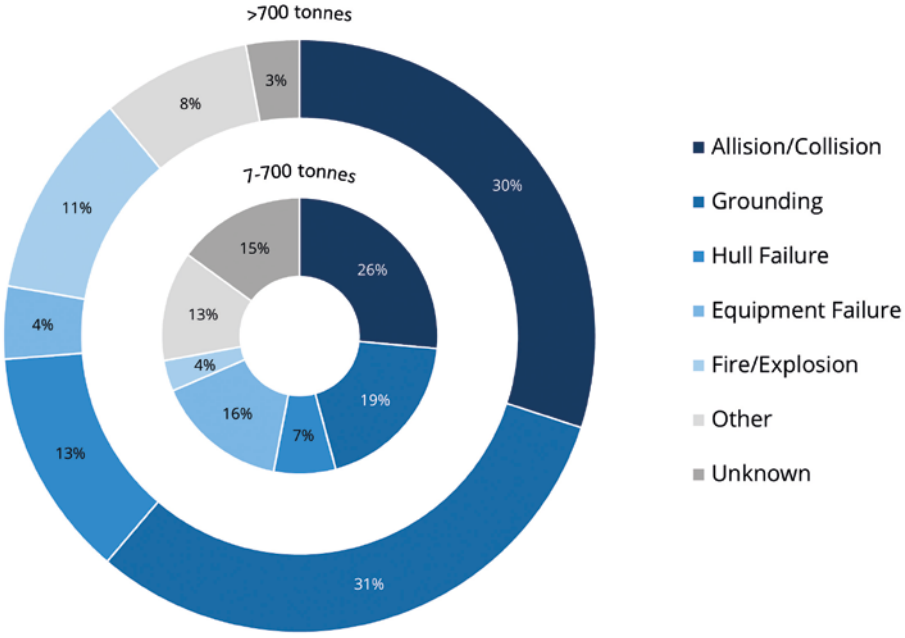
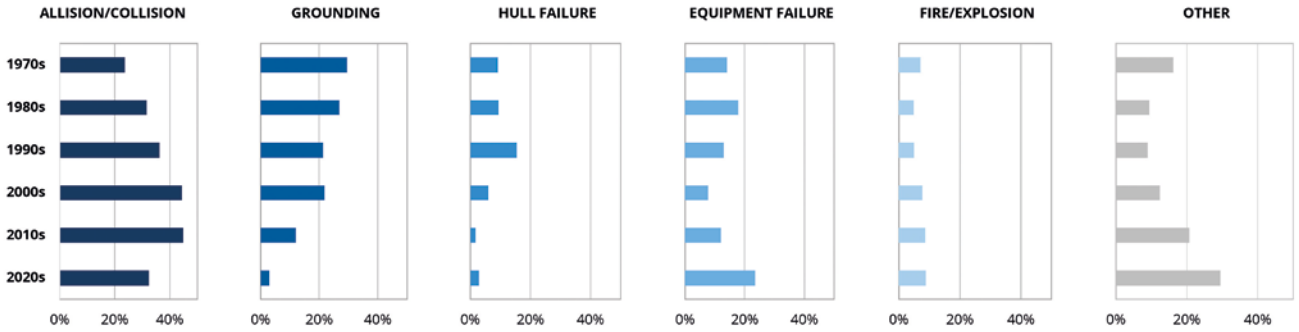


FIGURE 9: CAUSES OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES), 1970-2025

The most frequent causes of oil spills of seven tonnes and over from tankers are allisions/collisions and groundings

Most oil spills of seven tonnes and over recorded between 1970 and 2025 were caused by allisions/collisions and groundings. From Figure 10 overleaf, it is evident that while the overall number of spills has reduced over the decades, the proportion of those that arise from allisions/collisions has increased and those due to groundings have decreased. Figure 10 also demonstrates a decrease in the proportion of spills caused by hull failure, with a significant drop after the 1990s. About a third of spills recorded so far this decade were primarily caused by extreme weather events and human error, categorised as 'other'.



** Only six years of data available for the 2020s*

FIGURE 10: CAUSES OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) PER DECADE, 1970-2025

It can also be seen from Figure 11 that less than 10% of spills of seven tonnes or over are caused by fire/explosions. Interestingly, the quantity of oil lost as a result of fire/explosions is comparable to the quantity spilt from groundings and allisions/collisions, each responsible for about 26% of the total quantity of oil spilt since 1970.

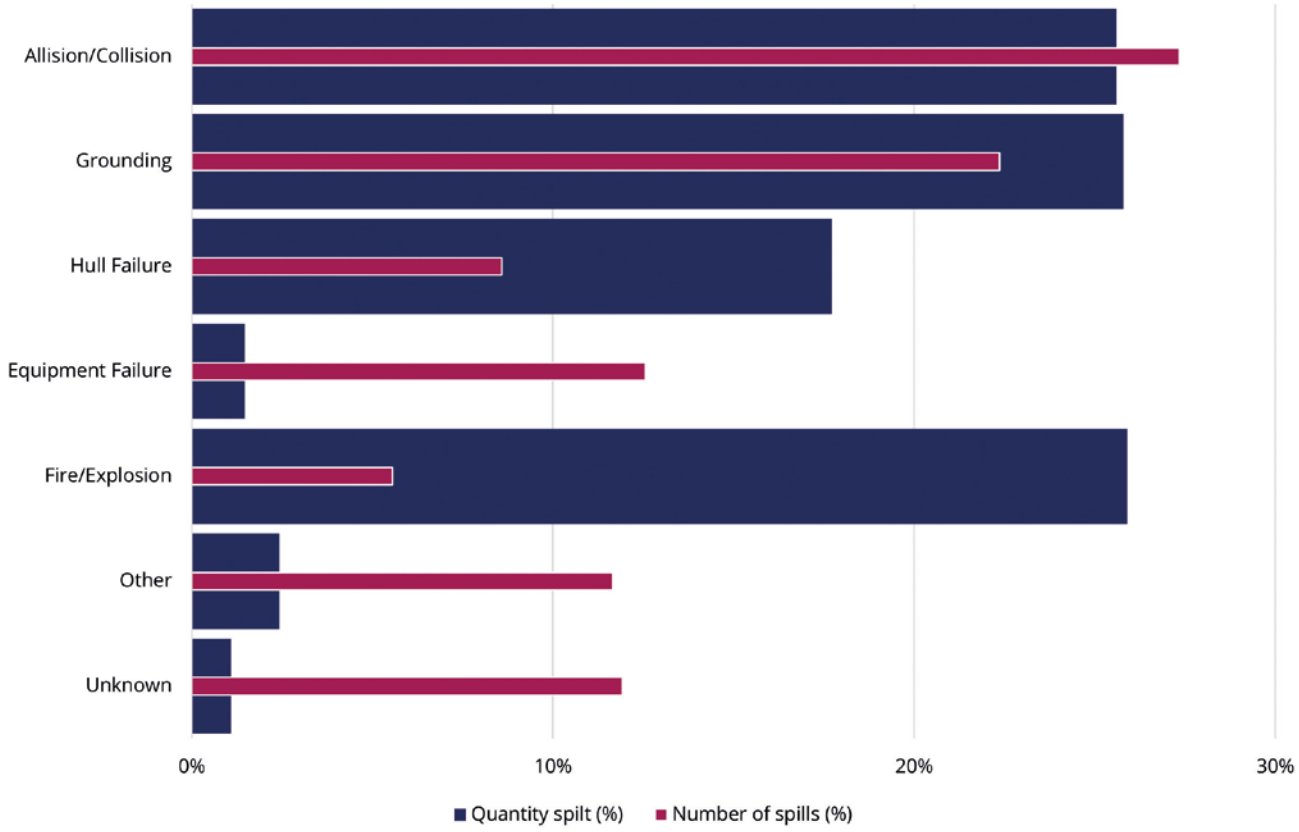


FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) AND QUANTITY SPILT PER CAUSE, 1970-2025

Vessel Operation at Time of Spill

In the following analysis, the operation that the vessel was undertaking at the time of the incident is explored.

Reporting of large spills (>700 tonnes) tends to provide more information and greater accuracy than smaller spills. Vessel operations for large spills have therefore been grouped into loading/discharging, bunkering, at anchor (inland/restricted waters), at anchor (open water), underway (inland/restricted waters), underway (open water), other operations and unknown operations.

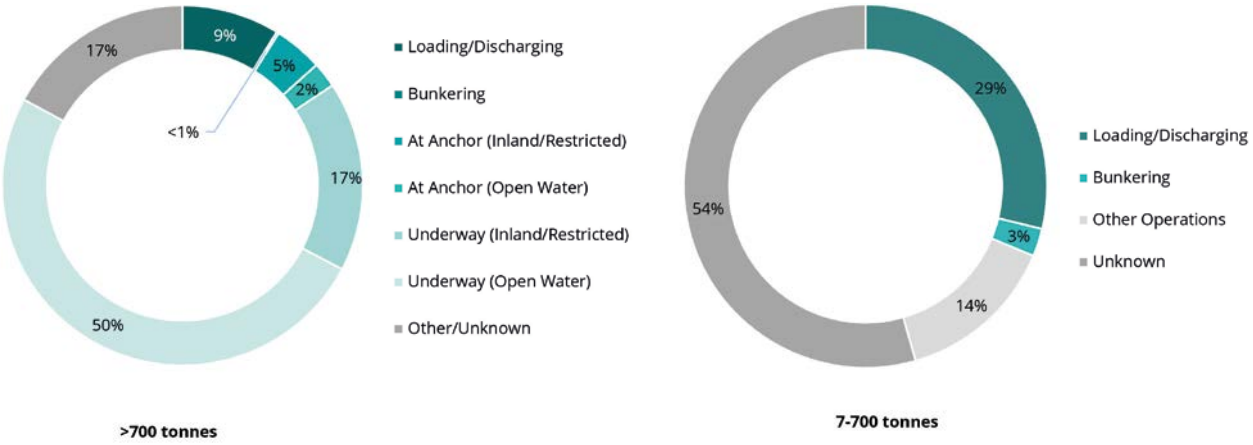


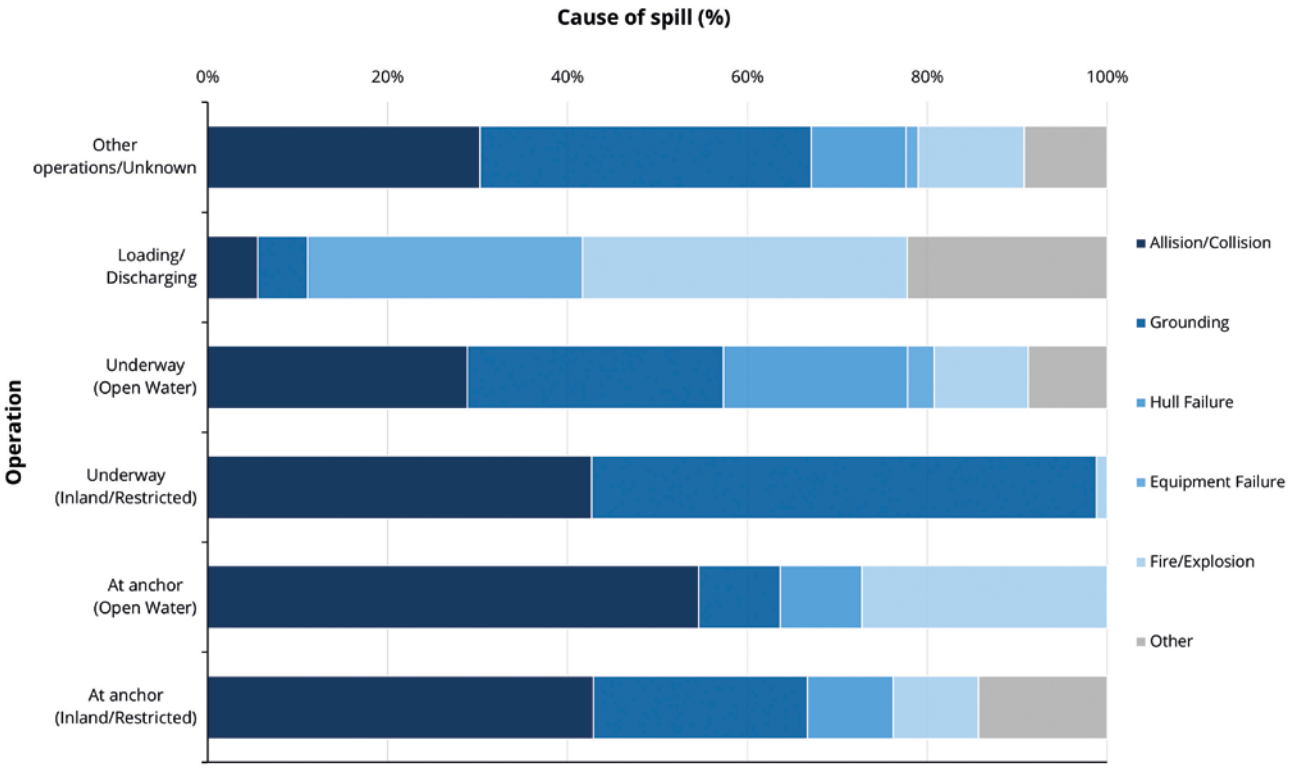
FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) BY OPERATION AT TIME OF INCIDENT, 1970-2025

Although reporting of medium spills (7-700 tonnes) has improved over recent decades, information available from the 1970s is deficient. Vessel operations for medium spills have therefore been grouped into loading/discharging, bunkering, other operations and unknown operations. Other operations include activities such as ballasting, de-ballasting, tank cleaning and when the vessel is underway.

From Figure 12, it can be seen that 50% of large spills occurred while the vessels were underway in open water. Allisions, collisions and groundings account for 57% of the causes of large spills (Figure 13). These same causes account for an even higher percentage of spills (99%) when the vessels were underway in inland or restricted waters. Restricted waters include water areas in ports and harbours.

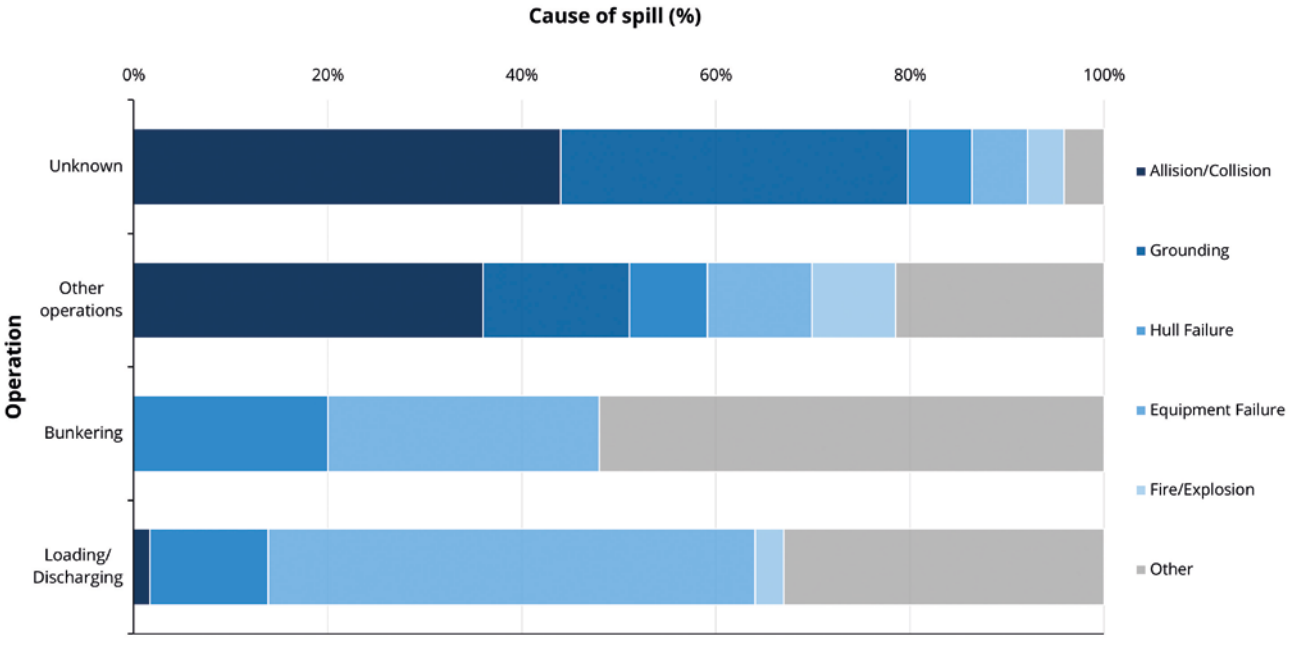
Nine percent of large spills recorded occurred during loading or discharging activities (Figure 12) which normally take place in ports and oil terminals. Significantly more medium spills (29%) occurred during these operations. Thirty-six percent of the large spills during loading and discharging were caused by fire/explosions; this is in contrast to about 3% of medium spills (see Figures 13 and 14). In addition, 31% of large spills during these operations resulted from equipment failure compared to approximately 50% for medium spills.

Spills by Cause and Operation



** Unknown causes are excluded*

FIGURE 13: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (>700 TONNES) BY OPERATION AT TIME OF INCIDENT AND PRIMARY CAUSE OF SPILL, 1970-2025



** Unknown causes are excluded*

FIGURE 14: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (7-700 TONNES) BY OPERATION AT TIME OF INCIDENT AND PRIMARY CAUSE OF SPILL, 1970-2025

Tables 4 and 5 show the number of spills by cause and operation for large and medium spills recorded from 1970 to 2025.

	OPERATIONS						
CAUSES	AT ANCHOR (INLAND/ RESTRICTED)	AT ANCHOR (OPEN WATER)	UNDERWAY (INLAND/ RESTRICTED)	UNDERWAY (OPEN WATER)	LOADING/ DISCHARGING	OTHER OPERATIONS/ UNKNOWN	TOTAL
ALLISION/ COLLISION	9	6	35	69	2	23	**144**
GROUNDING	5	1	46	68	2	28	**150**
HULL FAILURE	2	1	0	49	0	8	**60**
EQUIPMENT FAILURE	0	0	0	7	11	1	**19**
FIRE/EXPLOSION	2	3	1	25	13	10	**54**
OTHER	3	0	0	21	8	7	**39**
UNKNOWN	0	0	0	2	6	6	**14**
TOTAL	**21**	**11**	**82**	**241**	**42**	**83**	**480**
PERCENTAGE (%)	**4**	**2**	**17**	**50**	**9**	**18**	

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (>700 TONNES) BY OPERATION AT TIME OF INCIDENT AND PRIMARY CAUSE OF SPILL, 1970-2025

	OPERATIONS				
CAUSES	LOADING/ DISCHARGING	BUNKERING	OTHER OPERATIONS	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
ALLISION/ COLLISION	5	0	67	300	**372**
GROUNDING	0	0	28	244	**272**
HULL FAILURE	37	5	15	45	**102**
EQUIPMENT FAILURE	152	7	20	39	**218**
FIRE/EXPLOSION	9	0	16	26	**51**
OTHER	100	13	40	28	**181**
UNKNOWN	102	10	15	84	**211**
TOTAL	**405**	**35**	**201**	**766**	**1,407**
PERCENTAGE (%)	**29**	**2**	**14**	**55**	

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (7-700 TONNES) BY OPERATION AT TIME OF INCIDENT AND PRIMARY CAUSE OF SPILL, 1970-2025

Trends in Global Oil Tanker Spills since 2010

The overall trend in global oil tanker spills continues to decline, demonstrating significant progress over the decades. However, a closer examination of the frequency of spills reported since 2010 (see Figure 15) reveals that, although the long-term direction is downward, there are still fluctuations in the annual figures within a decade. These variations are depicted in Figure 2 and show that as the annual number of recorded spills draws closer to zero, the fluctuations are becoming less significant, leading to a more stable and consistent pattern in the data.

The average annual number of oil tanker spills of seven tonnes and over during the 2010s was 6.3, representing a substantial decrease of 65% compared to the average recorded in the 2000s, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 15. For the current decade, the annual average number stands at 7.2.

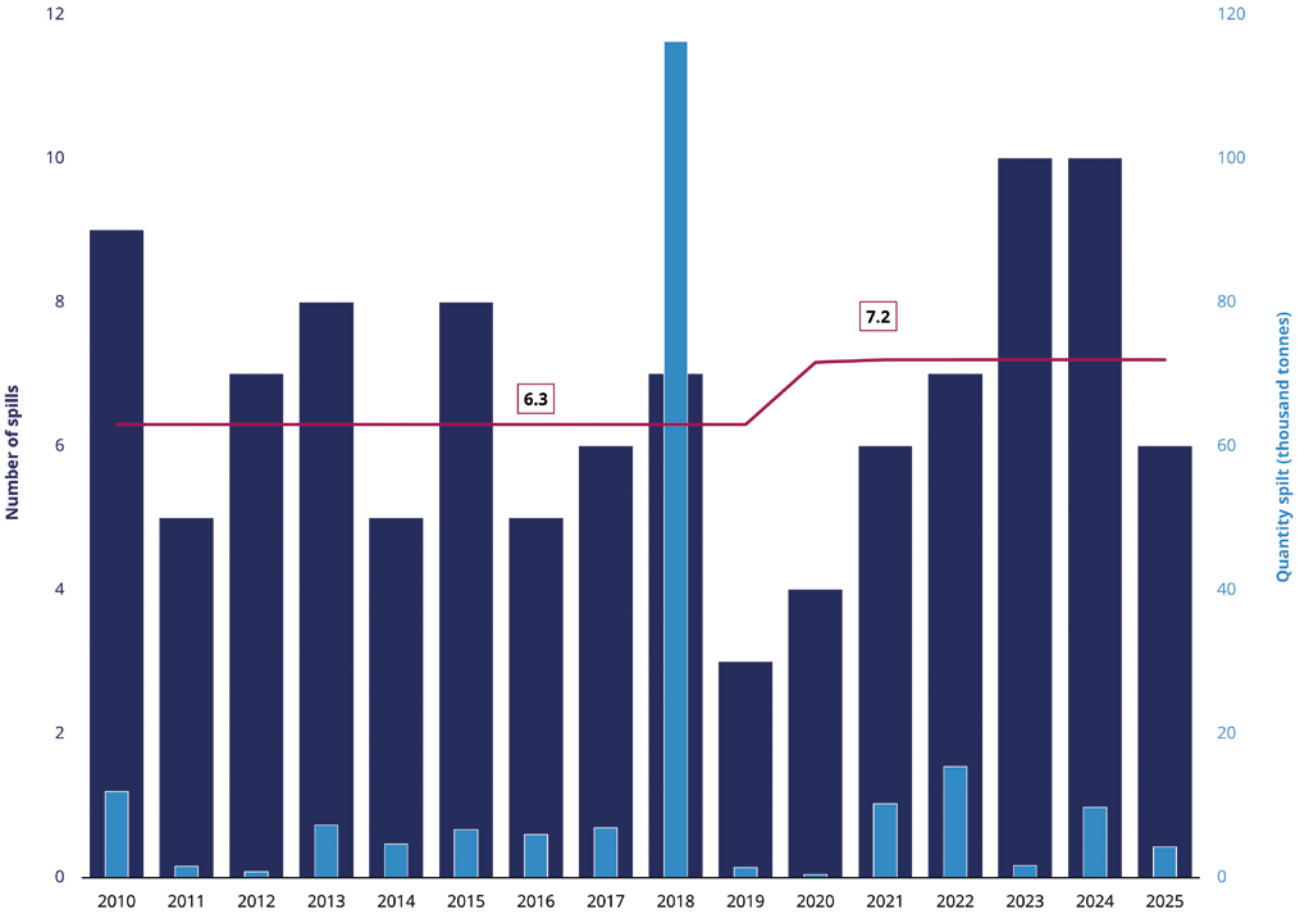


FIGURE 15: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) AND QUANTITIES OF OIL SPILT, 2010-2025

Six oil tanker spills occurred in 2025. This marks a lower incidence of spills compared to the average annual number of spills this decade.

Regarding the volume of oil spilt since 2010, most years have seen comparatively low annual quantities compared to previous decades. However, a single large spill in 2018 resulted in the largest annual quantity of oil spilt in 24 years (Figure 15). Also, the spill amount for 2022 is the second highest estimate in the past 16 years.

The most frequent cause of medium and large spills since 2010 is allisions/collisions. About 36% of spills resulted from allisions or collisions, which is higher than the proportions recorded for some previous decades since 1970. Groundings, conversely, have decreased significantly over the period. Eight percent of spills of seven tonnes and over recorded since 2010 were as a result of groundings compared to 30% for the 1970s (Figure 10). Twenty-one percent of spills since 2010 can also be attributed to extreme weather events and human error, categorised as 'other'. This is also higher than the percentage recorded for 'other' causes in previous decades.

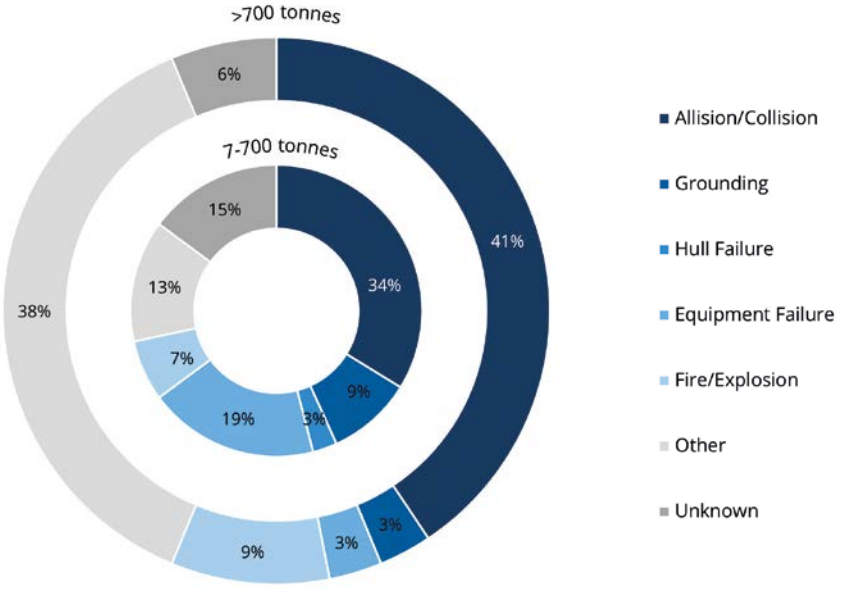
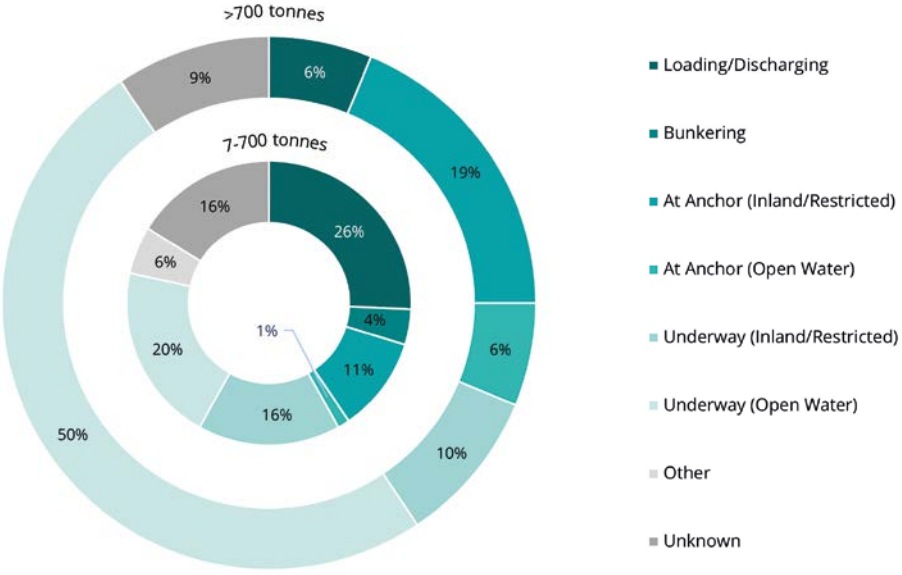


FIGURE 16: CAUSES OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES), 2010-2025

Figure 12 shows that for data gathered on medium spills since 1970, operations that vessels were undertaking at the time of the incident were largely 'unknown' (over 50%). However, data since 2010 shows that reporting has improved and the proportion of medium spills attributable to 'unknown' operations has reduced to 16%, close to the 9% recorded for large spills since 2010. This suggests that more accurate and consistent information is becoming available for spills of less than 700 tonnes. This has allowed further breakdown of vessel operations for medium spills as shown in Figure 17.

Similar to what was observed for earlier decades, most large spills since 2010 occurred while the vessels were underway in open water. For medium spills, the percentage of spills that occurred while the vessels were underway in open water compared to underway in inland water is only slightly higher (Figure 17).



** None of the spills occurred while the vessel was 'at anchor in open water'*

FIGURE 17: NUMBER OF TANKER SPILLS (≥7 TONNES) BY OPERATION, 2010-2025

About ITOPF

ITOPF operates on a not-for-profit basis to promote effective response to spills of oil, chemicals and other cargoes in the marine environment.

Since ITOPF's establishment in 1968, our technical staff have attended on site at around 870 shipping incidents in 100 countries to provide objective and scientific advice on clean-up measures, the effects of pollutants on the environment and economic activities, and on compensation. These incidents can involve oil, chemicals and other cargoes, whether bulk or packaged, as well as bunker fuel from all types of ship. We also provide advice in relation to oil spills from other potential sources of marine pollution, including pipelines and offshore installations; physical damage to coral reefs resulting from ship groundings; and environmental impacts associated with shipwrecks.

Our first-hand experience of pollution incidents is utilised during contingency planning and other advisory assignments for government and industry. We are an authoritative source of information on marine spills and share our knowledge at training courses and seminars throughout the world, encouraging best practice through outreach and education.

Practical guidance on oil and chemical spill response and effects in the marine environment is available through ITOPF's Technical Information Papers (TIPs) and its Response to Marine Oil Spills film series.

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