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# Oil Spill: We're well prepared on paper but sluggish response made preparedness a joke

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Written by [Jay Mazoomdaar](#) | New Delhi | Published: February 3, 2017 4:41 pm



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Two ships collided off the coast of Ennore in Tamil Nadu on Saturday. Inexplicably, Kamarajar port authorities did not report any oil spill when it informed the Indian Coast Guard about the accident on Sunday morning. By the time they owned up and the Coast Guard did the task of a damage was done. As oil sludge is being removed manually using large buckets since, the slick has travelled more than 30 km and tarred Chennai's Marina Beach.

This after 23 years of preparation since the government approved the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP) in November 1993, designating the Indian Coast Guard as the Central Coordinating Authority.

In 2015, the Coast Guard comprehensively revised the NOS-DCP to meet international standards, setting up an Online Oil Spill Advisory system that places India “amongst a select list of countries that have indigenously developed capabilities for prediction of trajectory of oil spills, mapping of environmental sensitivities in coastal zones, deployment of aerial dispersant spray system and facilitating the regional oil spill contingency plans”.



In this Tuesday, Jan.31, 2017 photo, Indian Coast Guard personnel work to clear the slick after an oil spill polluted the Ennore beach on the Bay of Bengal coast near Chennai, India.(AP Photo)

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The same year, India ratified the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001 (Bunker Convention) which ensures adequate, prompt, and effective compensation for damage caused by oil spills.

Since 2011, in collaboration with the government, Oil Spill India (OSI) — an international forum on oil spill prevention, preparedness, response and restoration systems — has been showcasing the best practices, technologies and experiences on oil spill management. Their 2016 Mumbai summit focussed on the theme of “Commitment, Synergy, Excellence”.

We put just about everything in place, on paper. And yet, a long term marine disaster is unfolding off Ennore coast with people already reporting dead fish and turtles.



Coast Guard, State revenue personnel, local volunteers, and fishermen removing black oil washed ashore as a thick oily tide from the sea lapped at the coast on Thursday, a day after an oil tanker and an LPG tanker collided near Kamarajar Port in Ennore in Chennai. PTI Photo

An oil slick causes damage through physical contact, ingestion, inhalation and absorption. It contaminates planktons, which in turn contaminate all who feed on them. Oil can kill eggs and larva. Exposure in adult fish leads to reduced growth, changes in heart and respiration rates, fin erosion and reproduction damage.

Toxic effects of oil can also kill larger animals. Sea turtles are vulnerable when they swim to shore for nesting. Birds that float on water get oiled and lose the ability to fly or dive. They also ingest or inhale oil on their feathers while grooming, causing immediate death or organ damage. Oil also hampers the water repellency of feather and fur, leading to hypothermia in birds or sea otters.



There are several technologies for containment and removal that depend on the nature of the spill and prevailing natural conditions. PTI Photo

Despite the sluggish response of the concerned authorities, it may not be still too late for significant damage control. There are several technologies for containment and removal that depend on the nature of the spill and prevailing natural conditions. The use of different types of booms, skimmer boats and aerial dispersants have been proved effective.

Now under pressure, the authorities should not be in a hurry to declare the clean-up operation complete. Spilled oil can persist in a natural system for a very long time and recovering every possible bit of it at this stage is crucial for marine wellbeing.

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