Oil Spills Essay, Research Paper

Oil is a product used by everyone, but sometimes oil is a problem. An oil spill is a

leakage from an oceangoing tanker, pipelines, or other oil sources. Oil spills occur very

frequently, and cause enormous ecological harm. About eight million barrels of oil are

spilled each year. Tankers usually carry about five-hundred million barrels of oil.

Many oil spills, large in land or ocean coverage, have had major impacts on the

earth and it?s inhabitants. Many animals are die and some are injured in some way. Many

plants and animals are endangered, or are now extinct. The largest oil spill to occur was

when the Exxon Valdez went aground and covered 4,800 square miles in Prince William

Sound, Alaska. This spill killed 35,000 sea birds, 10,000 otters, and at least nine whales.

The spill left pools of oil up to three feet on some beaches. In December of 1989, an

Iranian tanker leaked 70,000 tons, about 19 million gallons of oil off of the coast of

Morocco. In January 1990 a broken Exxon pipeline leaked 567,000 gallons into the New

York harbor. In June of 1990, another 260,000 gallons were spilled in New York Harbor.

A tanker carrying 38 million gallons of oil caught on fire, and leaked oil into the Gulf of

Mexico. This was a very serious threat to local shrimp nurseries and wildlife refuges. In

February of 1990, 300,000 gallons leaked from a damaged tanker off Southern California,

fouling miles of shoreline. In the Niger River delta, in Nigeria, Shell pipelines have

repeatedly burst. In 1970 oil spilled across 8 square km, which remained contaminated for

over 20 years.

According to the U.S. Coast guard, the incident rate post is only 0.5 spills per

year. In fact, there have been no large spills over 5,000 barrels from tankers in the US

since 1991. The US Coast Guard data shows that the amount of oil spilled by tankers has

decreased dramatically. Worldwide pollution from tanker spills is a relatively minor

source of marine pollution. It only represents a small fraction of the oil released to the

environment, when it is being compared to industrial waste, non-tanker shipping, and oil

seepage from natural resources. Ships are but one part of an overall safety system that

includes charting, aids to navigation, the condition of channels, and the resources that the

Coast guard can bring to ensure standards are being met. The United States suffers from

measurable neglect in portions of it?s marine infrastructure.

The Refuse Act, which was first enacted in 1899, makes it a crime to allow refuse

to enter navigable waters. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, makes it a crime to kill certain

birds. These laws were not intended to apply to an oil spill, but prosecutors use them to

intimidate and punish individuals without an obvious connection to a spill. The single

most positive improvement that Congress can make to the legal regime, is to amend the

Refuse Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, to make them inapplicable to oil spills

covered in the Clean Water Act. Oil Spill Wildlife Management (OSWM), in business

since 1989, is a wildlife consulting firm. OSWM offers it?s clients an alternative to the

wildlife dilemma. Donjon Environmental Marine Services is a synergistic organization

created to provide the maritime industry with responsive, and cost-effective answers to

meet the requirements of The Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Garner Environmental Services

provides a 24 hour emergency response for any type of pollution incidents. Garner

Environmental Services specializes in the management of disposal of waste streams, and

maintains a fleet if equipment and drivers to transport these waste streams from industries

on the Gulf Coast. Clean Venture Inc. is a leading contractor in handling waste, and

hazardous oil materials. Since, it?s establishment, Clean Venture Inc., has responded to

more than five thousand oil and hazardous material spills and has performed over ten

thousand projects, ranging in size from 1,000 to 3,000,000 dollars.

How can we prevent oil spills? The US oil and natural gas industry, supplies more

than 65 percent of America?s energy. ?By nearly every measure, the volume of spills in

US waters has been on a steady downward trend since 1973,? states Captain James D.

Spitzer, the chief of the US Coast Guard?s Office of Investigations. Most spills that occur

are usually small, based on data from the US Coast Guard. In 1997, more than

three-fourths of the spills in US waters were under ten gallons of oil, which is less than a

car?s fuel tank can hold. From the year of 1989, the year of the Exxon Valdez accident,

the amount of oil spilled in US waters has declined from fourteen million gallons to 1.1

million gallons spilled in 1997. Every part of the modern petroleum industry has

contributed to the progress being made. Exploration and production facilities use

advanced materials and techniques, with plenty of back up safety systems. Pipelines use

computers, electromagnetic instruments, and ultrasonic devices to detect weak spots, so

they can be repaired before it is to late and a leak develops. Marine terminals and vessels

are being made differently. Tankers are being built with double hulls. Storage tanks are

constructed of special materials to withstand corrosion. People play important roles in

prevention, by signing petitions, striking companies, and some boycott, which isn?t

successful because oil is an everyday use. Everyone can become a part of the

conservation and prevention of oil spills.