

Ennore Oil Spill - II

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What is NOS-DCP?

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- The National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan is action oriented and covers such aspects as reporting, communication, alerting, assessment, operations, administration, finances, public relations and arrangements with other contiguous states.

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- It also assigns responsibility for various tasks to relevant government departments and agencies, identifies trained personnel, equipment, and surface craft, and aircraft and means of access to these resources.

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What are the objectives of the plan?

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- To establish an effective system for detection and reporting of spills;

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- To establish adequate measures for preparedness for oil and chemical pollution;

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- To facilitate rapid and effective response to oil pollution;

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- To establish adequate measures for crew, responders, and public health and safety, and protection of the marine environment;

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- To establish appropriate response techniques to prevent, control, and combat oil and chemical pollution, and dispose-off recovered material in an environmentally sound manner; and

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- To maintain the evidences for the purpose of identifying the polluter and taking suitable administrative, civil or criminal action against the polluter.

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Is the NOS-DC Plan effective?

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- The Ennore incident is after 23 years since **the government approved the 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 placed India amongst a select list of countries that have indigenously developed capabilities for prediction of trajectory of oil spills.
- However, **a comprehensive plan is yet to be drawn up** and the entire clean up is being done manually - as the available equipment is meant for clearing oil spill in deep seas.
- Ship collisions are less common today because GPS-based navigation systems have made their operation much safer, so this collision comes at a time when there is a steady decline in such incidents.
- The first response to the collision was seriously deficient as the port authorities initially denied any significant environmental damage from oil.
- But as the scale of the disaster began to unfold, **the failure calls into question the efficacy of the NOS-DCP.**

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What does the incident underscores?

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- An independent inquiry is necessary to determine whether the training and acquisition of equipment to handle such accidents for all agencies is effective or not.

- Also, pollution response equipment for all the ports is funded 50% by the Centre, casting a responsibility on ports to contribute the other half and build the capabilities to handle disasters.
- **Obfuscation of facts after an oil spill is counterproductive**, since it could erode the confidence of the international community in the country's ability to fulfil its commitments to protect marine life and biodiversity.
- Failure to safeguard marine turtle and bird habitats, is a clear violation of the provisions of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.
- **The efficacy of chemical dispersants to degrade oil at sea remains controversial.**
- All this underscores the importance of timely advice from agencies such as the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), which is mandated to forecast the course of an oil spill.

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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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