

UPPER SW ATLANTIC



The Upper South West Atlantic Region comprises Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. It includes climates which vary from subtropical to temperate, and supports a great variety of ecosystems, such as mangroves, shoals, dunes, estuaries, coral reefs, beaches and wetlands. Commercial fishing and tourism are important activities in this region.

THE RISK OF OIL SPILLS

The quantities of oil transported through the region are relatively small (latest available figure - 130,000 barrels per day, representing 0.4% of the world's seaborne oil trade). With the region's increasing self-sufficiency in meeting its energy needs and growing production and refinery throughput, greater volumes of oil and petroleum products are being shipped and the risk of oil spills is increasing as a result.

Available data indicate that 70% of oil is transported by oceanic navigation, 27% by coastal navigation and 3% by river. The bulk of the coastal traffic consists of vessels bound for Belem and ports in Rio Amazonas, Rio de Janeiro and Rio de la Plata, as well as ports in the Pacific reached via the Straits of Magellan. For Argentina, tanker visits per year average 1,900 and for Brazil the figure is 8,000 visits. Evidence from past spills indicates that the greatest risk of spills is centred around busy oil handling areas, in particular Sao Sebastiao, Buenos Aires, La Plata and Bahia Blanca. Of the 211 tanker spills recorded since 1974, 180 occurred in or near a port. In the last year, production facilities in Brazil's offshore fields, most notably in the Campos Basin, north of Rio de Janeiro, have also suffered a spate of spills.

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In terms of navigational hazards, there are numerous outlying islands, banks and seamounts which are hazardous to shipping in the region, some lying up to 620 miles from the coast. In tropical Brazil coral reefs are widely distributed, but taken overall, navigational hazards in the South West Atlantic are relatively few.

Major tanker spills of over 5,000 tonnes in the Upper South West Atlantic Region since 1974

Vessel Name	Quantity spilled		Country	Year	Cause
	(tonnes)	(Type)			
GUNVOR MAERSK	16,000	WHITE PRODUCT	BRAZIL	1979	GROUNDING
TARIK IBN ZIYAD	12,000	CRUDE	BRAZIL	1975	GROUNDING
ESSO GARDEN STATE	5,400	CRUDE	BRAZIL	1974	LOADING
SAN JORGE	5,200	CRUDE	URUGUAY	1997	GROUNDING

THE STATE OF PREPAREDNESS

All three states have national contingency plans. Agreement exists between Argentina and Uruguay for response in the River Plate and a joint plan is being developed for this region, based on Argentina's existing plan.

Industry has funded much of the response equipment in place in the region. In Brazil and Argentina, this is sufficient for a Tier 2 response and in Uruguay for a Tier 1. In Brazil, stocks of specialised oil spill response equipment are primarily limited to those maintained and operated by PETROBRAS, which is relied upon by both the government and navy for resources and expertise in the event of a spill. PETROBRAS has recently installed nine new spill response centres, which have been in operation since December 2000. The centres are strategically located throughout the country, near the company's main bases. Each of the centres is equipped with special barges, oil recovery boats, skimmers, sorbents, containment and sorbent booms, which can be readily dispatched to any area in Brazil where an emergency occurs. The centres are also available to attend incidents from PETROBRAS branches in Argentina, Bolivia and Colombia. PETROBRAS also have an association with Clean Caribbean & Americas (CCA), a Tier 3 centre based in Florida, and has called upon their services for the Guanabara Bay and Parana refinery incidents.

In Argentina, a consortium of oil companies has resources to provide an effective response capability for a 5,000 tonne spill. For larger spills, international support has in the past been contracted. The government of Uruguay has a limited stock of equipment, but also primarily relies on private oil companies for the provision of equipment. Government agencies retain coordination roles in spill response, and provide advice on environmental protection, legal matters and decisions, approvals and permits on specific issues such as dispersant application, disposal and cleaning environmentally sensitive areas.

Most of the Latin American oil companies, including the state and ex-state companies, are members of ARPEL, the Regional Association of Oil and Natural Gas Companies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the event of a spill, member companies can call upon the organisation and fellow members for advice and resources. ARPEL has several ongoing initiatives concerning cooperative agreements and contingency planning. Although these are not legally binding, participation and adherence to these initiatives is encouraged. Created in 1965, its 25 member companies (local, regional and international) represent more than 90% of the regional upstream and downstream operations. It is a business forum for debating on the strategic issues concerning the oil and gas industry, working pro-actively to anticipate the effects of trends, policies and regulations, which may affect the industry's activities.



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ROCRAM (Operative Network for Regional Cooperation among Maritime Authorities of South America), developed under the aegis of the International Maritime Organization, is a cooperative agreement between the maritime nations of South America, Mexico, Panama & Cuba, designed to encourage development and operation in anti-pollution measures.

All three countries have ratified the OPRC Convention. As at October 2003, Argentina and Uruguay had ratified CLC 92 and Fund 92, whereas Brazil had ratified CLC 69 only.

STATUS OF CONTINGENCY PLANS, TIERED RESOURCES AND CONVENTIONS

	Competent National Authority	National Plan	Clean-up Resources		Subregional Agreement	MARPOL	OPRC '90	LLMC '76	CLC '69 CLC '92	FUND '92	Inter-vention '69/'73
			Tier 1	Tier 2							
Argentina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		'92	'92	'69
Brazil	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		'69		
Uruguay	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes		'92	'92	

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