

[Detailed guide: Clean an oil spill at sea and get oil spill treatments approved](#)

Updated: New form added

Oil spills at sea

You have 2 main options when dealing with an oil spill at sea.

Do nothing

You can let natural processes disperse, evaporate and degrade the spill for you – this is probably the best option when:

- the quantities of oil are small
- the oil is a type that tends to disperse or evaporate readily without intervention
- no marine resources are threatened by the spill

Use an oil spill treatment product

You can intervene if an oil spill represents a safety risk, or poses a significant threat to commercial, environmental or amenity interests. You must consider the effects of any intervention. [Some techniques](#) are poorly-suited to marine conditions around the coast of UK. Unless the oil can be physically recovered, the choice is often between leaving the oil alone or using an oil spill treatment product.

Request approval to use an oil spill treatment product

You need approval from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) before you use a product to treat oil.

MMO will respond within 1 hour approving or rejecting your request to use an [approved product](#) in English or Welsh waters.

The product must be approved by MMO and be used in line with the conditions of its approval.

Read MMO's

[Approval to use oil spill treatment products flowchart](#)
(PDF, 357KB, 7 pages)

Report a marine pollution incident

In a marine pollution incident MMO consults several organisations to ensure that specific scientific, environmental and fisheries advice is taken into account for every decision.

To report a marine pollution incident call:

- 0300 200 2024 within office hours
- 07770 977 825 outside office hours
- 0345 051 8486 or 0845 051 8486 at all times if other numbers out of order

You can use [approved oil spill treatment products](#) where there is a genuine risk to human life or to the safety of an installation or vessel without consulting with MMO.

MMO and the relevant statutory nature conservation agencies – Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee – should be informed after the incident.

MMO approves use in English and Welsh waters. Marine Scotland and Northern Ireland Environment Agency approve use in their waters.

MMO acts on behalf of the UK for testing and approving oil treatment products intended for use in UK waters.

Standing approvals

A standing approval is an agreement between MMO and a port or harbour authority, that specific oil spill treatment products may be used under certain conditions and in specific areas, without approval. This means a faster response to oil spills. Standing approvals may also be given to operators of oil and gas installations in coastal waters, or fixed locations such as terminals.

Port or harbour authorities must report to MMO that they have used a standing approval at the earliest possible opportunity.

Standing approvals for England and Wales exist at the locations below. You can view the extent of each standing approval on the [Coastal and Marine Resource Atlas](#) interactive map, by selecting the standing approvals layer on the list of layers.

- Bristol Port
- Fawley Oil Refinery, Southampton
- Felixstowe Port
- Fishguard Harbour, Goodwick (Stenaline)
- Fleetwood Enclosed Docks
- Harwich Haven Authority
- Humber Associated British Port
- Tetney Monobuoy at the Humber

- Immingham Associated Petroleum Terminal
- Ipswich Associated British Port
- Lowestoft Associated British Port
- Ramsgate Port
- Sheerness/Chatham Port
- Teddington Sea Reach Buoy 1
- Workington Prince of Wales Dock

Standing approvals are issued by MMO and you must contact MMO as soon as possible during an incident, and report back to them on the extent and success of product use once it is over. A typical report will include the following information:

- name of organisation
- incident number
- date
- nature of spill
- location
- remedial action taken
- product used (including volume)
- date of manufacture of the product used
- when the product's ability to produce the intended result (efficacy) was last tested (if applicable)
- comments on efficacy relating to incident
- other comments
- date of report
- time of report
- name of person making report

Standing approvals are for 5 years. You must submit another application before the expiry date.

Get an oil spill treatment approved

You must apply to MMO) if you want to market a new or rebranded oil spill treatment product for use in UK waters.

All products not previously approved will need to be tested for [toxicity](#). Dispersants, bioremediation products and some other types of oil spill treatment product will also have to be tested for their [efficacy](#).

Your approval must be renewed after 5 years, or sooner if specified, and you must notify MMO of any change in the company's name, address or the product's composition.

Send your completed [application form](#) and [payment](#) to MMO. You will need to provide evidence to support your application.

Renewing or rebranding an existing approved product will normally be considered on the basis that the product's composition is not significantly changed.

What you need to include in your application

Test results

If you have tested the product in a laboratory not commissioned by MMO, include the test results when you send your applications form. MMO will make sure the test data conforms to standard protocols – there will be a [fee](#) for this.

If you are using a laboratory commissioned by MMO, send a sample of the product separately from your application form to the laboratory – there will be a [testing fee](#).

The size of the sample will depend on the types of tests required. Full details are given on the application form or can be requested from MMO.

Label

The proposed product label must be approved by MMO and must contain:

- product name
- name, address and daytime or out of office hours telephone number of manufacturer, importer or rebrander
- list of ingredients
- oil spill treatment product type – dispersant type, sorbent, bioremediant or other
- a warning against mixing the product with any other products
- date of manufacture, batch number and expiry date (subject to extension)
- recommended storage instructions
- risk symbol and description
- instructions on use including a statement that the product should not be used in sea depths of fewer than 20 metres or within 1 nautical mile of such depths
- basic safety instructions or caution and any suitable chemical hazard signs

The label should also meet the requirements of the Classification, Labelling, and Packaging (CLP) Regulations

Approval

MMO will:

- consider the application
- examine the proposed labelling
- carry out toxicity and Efficacy testing as appropriate

The product may be marketed for use in English and Welsh waters as soon as MMO issues the formal approval notice. Details of the product and the name and address of the approval holder will be registered and this information will be made publicly available on the [approved oil spill treatment products](#)

[list.](#)

The product should not be used in Scottish or Northern Irish waters until Marine Scotland or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency confirm the approval.

Further information

[How to use oil spill treatment products and equipment](#)

[Approved oil spill treatment products](#)

[Get an oil spill treatment product approved: fees](#)

[Get an oil spill treatment product approved: application form](#)

[Marine Pollution Contingency Plan](#)

Contact information

Marine Conservation and Enforcement Team

0300 123 1032

dispersants@marinemanagement.org.uk