

OFFSHORE OIL POLLUTION

M E S S A G E

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO REDUCE THE
RISKS OF OIL POLLUTION

MAY 20, 1970.—Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed

The message referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the
State of the Union.

To the Congress of the United States:

The oil that fuels our industrial civilization can also foul our natural
environment.

The threat of oil pollution from ships—both at sea and in our har-
bors—represents a growing danger to our marine environment. With
the expansion of world trade over the past three decades, seaborne oil
transport has multiplied tenfold and presently constitutes more than
60 percent of the world's ocean commerce.

This increase in shipping has increased the oil pollution hazard.
Within the past ten years, there have been over 550 tanker collisions,
four-fifths of which have involved ships entering or leaving ports.
The routine discharge by tankers and other ships of oil and oily wastes
as a part of their regular operation is also a major contributor to the
oil pollution problem.

The development of world commerce and industry and its growing
dependence on oil need not result in these added dangers. The growing
threat from oil spills can be contained—not by stopping industrial

progress—but through a careful combination of international cooperation and national initiatives.

This message outlines a number of actions which the Congress should take to reduce the risks of oil pollution. It also announces additional executive measures which will promote this same end and calls for the cooperation of industry and the American public to aid in this important effort.

1. International Conventions

The problem of oil spills is a major international environmental problem and any remedy must deal effectively with its global implications. Last year in Brussels, working under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization, an arm of the United Nations, the United States joined with other nations in reaching important agreements in this area. We signed two new conventions which would allow us to take actions within an international framework to prevent oil spill damages and to assure compensation when spills occur.

Today, I am transmitting these conventions to the Senate for its advice and consent. The ratification of the first of these conventions will empower us, by international agreement, to take preventive action against vessels on the high seas which threaten imminent pollution danger to our coasts. Had this treaty been in force at the time of the Torrey Canyon disaster in 1967, effective action could have been initiated without delay to prevent or limit the damaging effects. The second convention imposes strict civil liability upon the owner of vessels responsible for pollution damage to coastal areas, regardless of the location of the vessel. The Congress should consider the differences between existing domestic legislation and this convention and, if necessary, enact conforming legislation. In ratifying these conventions, we will demonstrate our firm belief that the danger of oil pollution is an urgent matter for international regulation, and that innocent victims of oil spills should not go uncompensated.

Another major international action to curb oil pollution was the adoption last year of amendments to the 1954 Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil. These amendments deal principally with the intentional discharge of oil or oily wastes on the high seas and establish new rules prohibiting the discharge of oil within 50 miles of our coast. These amendments are also being submitted to the Senate for its advice and consent, and legislation will be submitted to provide for the effective enforcement of these new international requirements.

The amendments to the 1954 Convention may not go into effect for some time, since they require ratification by other nations. This process could take several years. Therefore, I am instructing appropriate United States authorities to bring the provisions of these amendments into effect with respect to American vessels as soon as the implementing legislation is adopted. I hope that other nations will take similar action to implement these changes for their own vessels before the treaty amendments go into effect.

The government of the United States is eager to participate in any international forum considering the problems of marine pollution.

We particularly support the efforts of NATO's Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society which will sponsor a conference this fall in Brussels to exchange information and make recommendations for further international action concerning oil spills.

2. International Standards for Ship Construction and Operation

The best way to protect our ocean resources and coastal areas from oil damage is to prevent the occurrence of oil spills. The establishment of more effective international standards for both the construction and the operation of tanker vessels will materially reduce the potential hazard.

The Secretary of State is being instructed to seek effective multilateral action to prescribe international standards for the construction and operation of tankers. The Secretary of Commerce, with the assistance of the Secretary of Transportation, will develop the specific technical standards or criteria which could form the basis for multilateral action.

3. Ports and Waterways Safety Act

I am asking the Congress to enact the Ports and Waterways Safety Act of 1970, a law which would give the Coast Guard additional authority to protect against oil spills in several important ways. It would allow the Coast Guard to control vessel traffic in the inland waters and the territorial seas of the United States, to regulate the handling and storage of dangerous cargoes on the waterfront, to establish safety requirements for waterfront equipment and facilities, and to set up safety zones or other controlled access areas in and near U.S. ports and harbors. This legislation could significantly enhance our drive to prevent oil pollution and I hope the Congress will give it early and favorable attention.

4. Increased Surveillance

A large number of oil spills occur in waters close to our shores. Many of these spills result from willful violations of laws which limit the discharging of oil. Such spills can be reduced by more stringent surveillance procedures. All government agencies are being directed to instruct their vessel and aircraft commanders and other personnel to immediately report all oil spills to the Coast Guard. Every citizen who observes a spill of oil should do likewise. The Commandant of the Coast Guard will increase all-shore air patrols in the areas of highest spill potential and will enforce vigorously all of our anti-pollution laws.

5. Harbor Advisory Radar Systems

Just as air traffic controllers are necessary to the safe operation of airplanes, so an improved traffic control system is needed in our nation's most active harbors. A system which is known as the Harbor Advisory Radar System has been developed and is now operating successfully in the San Francisco area. The Secretary of Transportation will establish more such systems in ports that have a heavy traffic of oil-bearing vessels. These radar systems, operated by the Coast Guard, will enable tankers and other vessels to move through congested areas with much less risk of collision and will make ports such as New York, New Orleans and Houston safer than they are at present. Pilots who use these ports will receive harbor surveillance data and traffic infor-

mation by radio from a control center that will be manned 24 hours a day throughout the year.

6. Research and Development: Emergency Oil Transfer and Storage Systems

In addition to specific legislation and regulations that can contribute significantly to the reduction of oil spill hazards, a broad program of research and development concerning oil pollution must also be pursued. These efforts must be sufficiently diverse to treat all aspects of spill prevention, cleanup and the mitigation of ecological damage. Many such programs are now underway in government agencies and university laboratories. These research and development efforts will continue to receive emphasis until satisfactory solutions are found.

One notable result of our research is the test which was conducted last week of an ingenious system for collecting and removing oil from damaged vessels. Using this system, up to 20,000 tons of oil a day could be pumped from stranded or leaking tankers into oil-tight plastic bags. These bags could be delivered by air to the scene of the accident and could be towed away safely. The Secretary of Transportation will examine the results of the current tests and will make such a system available for use on both the east and west coasts of this country as soon as practicable.

7. Cooperation of Private Industry and Port Authorities

If we are to stop or even reduce the discharge of waste oil at sea, then we must provide alternate means of disposing of it. Port areas should be equipped with facilities, stationary or mobile, to receive oily discharges from vessels upon their arrival in port. If the amendments to the 1954 Oil Pollution Convention I have referred to are adopted and permissible oil discharges at sea are further reduced, then such facilities will be indispensable. Therefore, I am calling upon private industry and port authorities to develop additional facilities for the reception of oily wastes. The Secretary of Commerce with the assistance of the Secretaries of Interior and Transportation will coordinate this effort.

8. Radiotelephones

Vessels in the United States navigable waters are presently required only to use whistle signals to communicate with other vessels. Direct radio communications between vessels would supplement and clarify the information they are able to exchange as they maneuver in close proximity to one another. Legislation to require the use of bridge-to-bridge radiotelephones is now pending in the Congress and I urge its prompt enactment.

9. The Licensing of Towboat Operators

Legislation is also pending in the Congress that would require uninspected towing vessels to be under the direction and control of a licensed operator. I endorse that concept and call for its consideration by the Congress. We must do everything we can to increase the margin of safety for maritime traffic.

10. Financing Cleanup Operations

When oil spills occur, considerable resources are required to finance the cleanup operation. The provisions of the Water Quality Improve-

ment Act of 1970 call for the establishment of a revolving fund which will assure that money is immediately available to initiate and conduct such efforts. The law provides that the fund shall be reimbursed by those who are responsible for the spill.

Today, I am announcing the formal establishment of that fund and am delegating responsibility for its administration to the Secretary of Transportation. As soon as regulations governing the operations of this fund are completed and approved, I will forward to the Congress a request for \$35 million to finance its operations.

This Administration is committed to protect the national environment without retarding social and economic progress. The program outlined in this message involves significant national and international actions which will help us to meet this commitment. By working to reduce and prevent oil spills and by responding more effectively to those spills which do occur, these measures will help to improve the quality of life in our nation and in all parts of our world.

RICHARD NIXON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *May 20, 1970.*