

Frequently-Asked Questions

Environmental Concerns

Here are answers to some questions that people have asked about environmental issues.

Q. What are the potential ecological effects of in-situ burning (ISB)?

A. The potential ecological impacts of ISB have not been extensively discussed or studied. Burning oil on the surface of the water could have a small adverse effect on organisms that inhabit the uppermost layers of the water column (such as fish larvae and eggs); however, the area affected would presumably be small relative to the total surface area and depth of a given body of water. In addition, burn residues may sink, potentially exposing some benthic (bottom-dwelling) plants and animals. It is possible that burn residues may foul gills, feathers, fur, or baleen. Overall, these impacts would be expected to be much less severe than those resulting from exposure to a large, uncontained oil spill.

Q. What are the impacts of a large, uncontained spill?

A. Oil spills can destroy fisheries, contaminate shellfish beds, injure archeological sites, coat recreational beaches, harm or kill wildlife, and destroy coastal habitat. Oil that comes into contact with mammals and birds can destroy the insulating ability of fur and feathers, reduce buoyancy, and be ingested as the animal cleans itself. Animals in a spill area can die of exposure, drowning, internal bleeding, and suffocation. Wildlife vulnerable to oil spills include shorebirds, bald eagles, sea otters, sea lions, harbor seals, and terrestrial mammals that may feed on oiled carcasses. There is also some evidence suggesting that oil spills may be linked to whale deaths.

Q. What effect does ISB have on shoreline contamination?

A. Shoreline effects are usually minimized when ISB is conducted. Properly planned and implemented, in-situ burning can prevent or significantly reduce the extent of shoreline impacts, including exposure of sensitive natural, recreational, and commercial resources.

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