

CHAPTER 5:

Marine Oil Spillage in Malaysian Waters

5.1 Introduction

Oil spill is defined as the release of liquid petroleum hydrocarbon into the environment due to anthropogenic activities (Najafi et al., 2009). Oil spills in general, whether on land or in natural water bodies, constitutes some of the worst environmental disasters known to man. However, oil spills in the marine environment are particularly destructive to nature and disruptive to humans, especially when the extent of the spillage intrudes into all three of the ‘spheres’ that make up the marine environment; the hydrosphere, biosphere and the lithosphere.

Marine oil spills can result from various sources. Among those frequently reported are vessel-to-vessel collisions, groundings, capsizals, leakages of oil-carrying pipelines, and unscrupulous dumping or discharge of oil from marine vessels. Other contributors to oil spills in the marine environment include bilge pumping and tank cleaning by boat operators, port operations, offshore oil and gas explorations, production rigs, and ballast water discharges. The oil mentioned can come in various forms, of which the most commonly encountered are crude oil, diesel and heavy fuel oil. This chapter will focus on marine oil spill in the Malaysian context. Statistics and examples on oil spill incidents in Malaysian waters have been compiled while the impact of oil spills to both humans and the environment in general is touched on. Information on marine oil spill disaster prevention and management by the authorities in Malaysia wraps up this chapter.

Malaysia is a beautiful country with more than 4670 km of coastal border (Pourvakhshouri et al., 2004). On top of that, Malaysia is surrounded by some of the busiest waterways on the planet, namely the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Singapore and the South China Sea. The