

What is MARPOL?

The keystone of IMO's marine environment protection regulatory structure is the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships and its related Protocol known world-wide as MARPOL 73/78. This is the most ambitious international treaty, covering marine pollution, ever adopted. It deals not only with oil but also with

- Noxious liquid substances carried in bulk (e.g. hazardous chemicals),
- Harmful substances carried in packages, and
- Sewage and garbage.



SAVE OUR SEAS!



The main elements of MARPOL 73/78

- * Discharge into the sea of oil and chemicals, sewage and garbage necessary in the normal operation of ships strictly limited and prohibited in particularly environmentally-sensitive sea areas (e.g. Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Baltic Sea, Red Sea and the Gulf area, and Gulf of Aden).
- * Establishment of shore-based reception facilities for oil and chemical residues, garbage and sewage.
- * Strict ship construction and equipment standards which minimize to the extent practicable the release of oil and chemicals in case of an accident.
- * Mandatory provision for ship inspections and surveys to ensure compliance with international standards.
- * Incidents involving oil and other harmful substances must be reported without delay.
- * Co-operation between Governments in the detection of violations and enforcements of the rules.
- * Rapid 'tacit amendment' procedures to take account of changes in technology and international seaborne trade.
- * Promotion of technical co-operation.

The main objective of this Convention is to reduce to a minimum and, in certain instances, prohibit the operational discharge of marine pollutants from ships through

- the establishment of operational discharge criteria and procedures, and
- construction and equipment standards.

In addition, ship design features are introduced to minimize the outflow of oil in the event of an accident.

The Convention is implemented by nations through the promulgation of national legislation and regulations which affect ships which fly their flags and use their ports and coastal waters.

By such means, nations give real effect to the provision of MARPOL 73/78 and provide a regime whereby violations of the international rules and standards are prohibited and punished with sufficient severity to discourage future violations.

Amongst the several pollution issues covered by the MARPOL Protocol, the one most commonly found in the developing countries relates to the disposal of garbage and sewage.

Persistent forms of garbage, in particular, plastics — including synthetic ropes, fishing nets and plastic bags — are now widely recognized as posing a severe threat to the marine environment

and, in particular, to marine mammals. Annex V of MARPOL 73/78 therefore prohibits the disposal of plastics in the sea from ships as well as from offshore platforms. Such waste must be retained on board for discharge at port reception facilities unless reduced to ash by incineration.

The disposal of other types of garbage is subject to a range of requirements, from total prohibition in special areas (e.g. Mediterranean, Baltic, Black and Red Seas, and the Gulf area) to permitted disposal from 3 to 25 miles offshore.

Sewage discharge from ships is prohibited under Annex IV of MARPOL 73/78 except under special conditions, such as through a sewage treatment plant and while the ship is proceeding more than 12 miles from land.

All the Annexes of MARPOL 73/78, with one exception (Annex III — Noxious Substances in Packaged Form), make provision whereby Governments undertake to provide facilities at ports and terminals for the reception of oily and chemical wastes or cargo residues, garbage and sewage, adequate to meet the needs of the ships using them and without causing undue delay to the vessels.