INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LATEST TECHNOLOGY IN ENGINEERING, MANAGEMENT & APPLIED SCIENCE (IJLTEMAS)

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XIV, Issue XI, November 2025

Comprehensive Study on Oil Spills: Causes, Impacts, Detection, and Mitigation Techniques

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2025.1411000009

Received: 18 November 2025; Accepted: 24 November 2025; Published: 01 December 2025

ABSTRACT:

Oil spills pose severe threats to marine ecosystems, human health, and global economies. The paper examines oil spill causes, environmental impacts, detection technologies, and mitigation strategies. It also evaluates modern approaches such as remote sensing, AI-enabled spill detection, nanotechnology-based cleanup, and emerging eco-friendly solutions. The findings highlight global challenges and propose sustainable solutions for improved preparedness and response.

Keywords— Oil spills, Marine pollution, Remote sensing, Bioremediation, Environmental impact, Spill detection.

INTRODUCTION

Oil spill contamination remains one of the most critical environmental challenges across the globe. Offshore drilling, pipeline ruptures, shipping accidents, and storage failures contribute significantly to large-scale spills. The persistence of oil in marine water affects aquatic life, food chains, coastal biodiversity, and human livelihoods. Despite advancements in monitoring systems and remediation technologies, incidents continue to occur due to aging infrastructure, operational errors, and natural hazards.

The motivation for this study is to examine the technological evolution in oil spill detection and response, evaluate the environmental consequences, and explore the potential for applying modern predictive systems. This paper aims to provide a consolidated review suitable for researchers, policymakers, and environmental engineers.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Oil spill research has advanced significantly in the last decade. However, disparities in technology access and implementation efficiency remain.Key contributions include:

Traditional Detection Methods: Surface visual observation, aerial surveillance, and vessel-based patrolling. The drawbac involve Subject to human error, weather limitations, and slow response time.

Remote Sensing oTechnolgy: SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar), hyperspectral imaging, and thermal infrared scanning are frequently used for identifying hydrocarbon signatures. Comparative Insight: are SAR remains the most reliable for rapid, large-scale detection. Optical sensors offer detail but are weather-dependent.

Machine Learning Techniques: Deep learning algorithms perform classification of oil slicks in satellite images, reducing human intervention and error.Predictive Drift Models: are Forecast spill movement for early intervention. The limitation of Drift Models are extensive datasets and high computational resources—often lacking in developing nations.

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Bioremediation Studies: Microorganisms such as Pseudomonas, Alcanivorax, and Bacillus species degrade hydrocarbons naturally. Bioremediation is environmentally safe but slow and dependent on temperature, nutrient availability, and oil composition.

Chemical Dispersants Research: Advances in eco-friendly dispersants have improved emulsification and dispersion rates./ Next-generation dispersants claim reduced toxicity, yet their long-term ecological safety remains uncertain

The literature indicates a shift from manual spill response toward automated, data-driven early-warning systems.

Causes of Oil Spills

Oil spills occur due to:

A. Operational and Mechanical Failures

Tanker collisions

Offshore drilling blowouts

Faulty pipelines

Storage tank leakage

B. Natural Disasters

Earthquakes

Cyclones

Tsunamis causing structural damage

C. Human Factors

Inadequate training

Poor safety practices

Navigation errors

D. Sabotage and Illegal Discharges

Intentional dumping

Pipeline vandalism

Environmental and Health Impacts

Oil spills cause long-term ecological and socio-economic damage.

A. Marine Life

Toxicity affecting fish, turtles, and marine mammals

Smothering of coral reefs

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Reduction in oxygen levels

Bioaccumulation of hydrocarbons

B. Human Health

Skin irritation, respiratory issues

Contamination of food chains

Psychological stress and livelihood loss

C. Coastal Economy

Loss of fisheries

Decline in tourism

Costly clean-up operations

High remediation expenditure (e.g., Deepwater Horizon exceeded USD 65 billion)

Oil Spill Detection Methods

A. Satellite-Based Detection

Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)

Detects oil slicks under all weather conditions /SAR are highly reliable and operationally versatile.

Optical Sensors

Visible and near-infrared imaging

B. Drone Surveillance

Low-cost UAVs monitor coastal areas

Real-time imaging with geo-tagging

C. AI/ML-Based Monitoring

Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) for pattern recognition

Predictive spill modelling

D. Sensor-Based Marine Monitoring

Buoy sensors for hydrocarbon detection

Conductivity and fluorescence measurements

Mitigation and Cleanup Techniques

A. Physical Methods

Booms and Skimmers

Contain and remove floating oil

Sorbent Materials

Organic, synthetic, and inorganic sorbents

B. Chemical Methods

Oil Dispersants

Break down oil into microdroplets

Solidifiers

Convert oil into semi-solid material

C. Biological Methods

Bioremediation

Microbial degradation

Phytoremediation

Use of plants to absorb contaminants

D. Emerging Technologies

Nanotechnology materials for absorption

Autonomous cleaning robots

AI-based spill prediction systems

Policy Frameworks and International Regulations

Several global conventions regulate oil spill prevention nclude:Key regulations are

MARPOL 73/78 (International Convention for Pollution Control)

OPRC 1990 (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation)

Clean Water Act (USA)

Regional protocols for coastal protection

These frameworks mandate reporting procedures, emergency planning, and liability enforcement.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that while preventive regulations and technologies exist, gaps remain in coordination, response speed, and technological deployment. Developing countries face greater challenges due to limited infrastructure and high cleanup costs. This improved discussion analyzes n real-world applicability: Advanced detection systems are promising but financially inaccessible for many regions. AI and ML require robust data infrastructure, posing challenges in low-resource settings. Bioremediation remains a long-term strategy, unsuitable for immediate spill containment. Mechanical methods, though simple, struggle in high-wave or

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XIV, Issue XI, November 2025

storm conditions. A combined strategy integrating satellites, drones, AI prediction models, and rapid-response mechanical systems offers the most practical solution. This comprehensive comparison enhances clarity and depth/ Integration of remote sensing, AI models, and automated response systems can significantly reduce environmental impacts.

CONCLUSION

Oil spills continue to pose environmental and economic threats. Innovations in sensing technology, eco-friendly cleanup methods, and advanced predictive systems offer promising solutions. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and adopting global best practices are essential for effective spill management. Future research should focus on environmentally safe dispersants, high-resolution imaging technologies, and machine learning-based forecasting systems. AI-enabled monitoring, and eco-friendly bioremediation show significant potential for future spill management.

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