

Oil Slick Detected after Liberian Container Vessel Sinks off Kerala Coast; ICG Leads Pollution Response

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The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) launched a full-scale pollution response operation following the sinking of the Liberian container vessel MV MSC ELSA 3, which went down on May 25, 2025, approximately 15 nautical miles southwest of Alappuzha, Kerala. Within hours of the vessel's submergence, ICG surveillance aircraft detected an oil slick at the site. ICG Ship Saksham, already stationed in pollution response configuration, was deployed immediately. An ICG Dornier aircraft conducted aerial assessments and dispersed Oil Spill Dispersant (OSD) across the affected zone.

By late morning on May 25, the oil slick was spotted drifting east-southeast from the site of the sinking at a speed of 1.5 to 2 knots. Rough sea conditions and strong winds made response efforts more challenging. Despite the hazardous situation, with over 100 cargo containers floating in the area, some breaking apart and releasing their contents, ICG continued operations with full effect. To ensure safety, all passing ships have been diverted, and mariners have been warned to navigate cautiously due to floating debris and potential navigation hazards.

ICG intensified surveillance and spill mitigation efforts using aerial sorties and specialised dispersal equipment. Two Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) remain on-site for round-the-clock monitoring, while pollution response vessel Samudra Prahari and additional OPVs have been mobilised with large quantities of OSD.

The Mercantile Marine Department, Kochi, issued a pollution liability warning to the vessel owners M/s MSC under the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. The MSC appointed T&T Salvage for container recovery, oil removal, and environmental clean-up. The ICG also advised the Kerala state administration to prepare for shoreline clean-up and to alert local communities not to handle any cargo or debris that may wash ashore.

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