

ENVIRONMENTAL ALERT

ALERT NUMBER: 04/2013

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INCIDENT / ALERT DETAILS:

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) have recently advised DECC that a number of samples of oil that have been taken recently in connection with the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry have highlighted issues with regard to the;

- rational for taking the oil sample and
- method of collection and handling of the samples i.e. sample integrity and audit trail from sampling point to laboratory.

The samples recently provided to the MCA had been handled in such a manner that any analysis carried out would not deliver a meaningful outcome in terms of confidence in what had been analysed.

Operators are reminded that should there be a necessity to obtain samples of oil from the sea surface, following a spill, to ensure the correct procedures are followed for the taking and forwarding of samples, many of which are detailed within respective Oil Pollution Emergency Plans.

INITIAL/ALERT FINDINGS:

The main points to note when taking and handling samples are:

- Oil samples should be collected directly with sampling jars or sorbent pads – glassware should be guaranteed clean – i.e. not contaminated with any material. Sample bottles in all formal sampling kits must comply.
- The use of closed metal receptacles or plastic jars is strongly discouraged as contact with metal or plastic can interfere with the analysis.
- Samples and sampling equipment should be handled and stored according to the audit trail you have decided on. That will ensure that the samples cannot be manipulated, mixed up, or else be contaminated by other substances.
- Arrange for transportation of the samples to the laboratory as soon as possible to minimise possibility of further degradation/changes.
- Sample labels should be completed accurately, and as fully as possible. Every action should be taken to prevent a decrease in the samples' value as evidence.

The protocols for the handling of oil samples are well established across MCA, the Bonn Agreement and ITOPF. The two links below provide detail on the rationale for taking and how to collect samples.

http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/stop4_01.pdf

<http://www.itopf.co.uk/information-services/publications/documents/TIP14SamplingandMonitoringofMarineOilSpills.pdf>

Further Information

Any queries relating to this alert should be addressed to:

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