

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
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July 9, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I am transmitting today proposed legislation entitled the "Comprehensive Oil Pollution Liability and Compensation Act of 1975."

This legislation would establish a comprehensive and uniform system for fixing liability and settling claims for oil pollution damages in U.S. waters and coastlines. The proposal would also implement two international conventions dealing with oil pollution caused by tankers on the high seas.

I consider this legislation to be of high national importance as we seek to meet our energy needs in an environmentally sound manner. Those energy needs require accelerated development of our offshore oil and gas resources and the increased use of tankers and deep water ports. This proposal would provide a broad range of protection against the potential oil spills necessarily associated with these activities.

In recent years, we have taken significant steps to limit and control oil pollution in the waters of the United States. Yet, in 1973 alone, there were 13,328 reported oil spills totalling more than 24 million gallons. One-third of the oil spilled is from unidentified sources, where compensation cannot be obtained under existing law. The ability of claimants damaged by spills to seek and recover full compensation is further hampered by widely inconsistent Federal and State laws. Various compensation funds have been established or proposed, resulting in unnecessary duplication in administration and in fee payments by producers and consumers.

This legislation would help protect our environment by establishing strict liability for all oil pollution damages from identifiable sources and providing strong economic incentives for operators to prevent spills. Equally important, the bill will provide relief for many oil-related environmental damages which in the past went uncompensated. For example, State and local governments will be able to claim compensation for damages to natural resources under their jurisdiction.

This legislation would replace a patchwork of overlapping and sometimes conflicting Federal and State laws. In addition to defining liability for oil spills, it would establish a uniform system for settling claims and assure that none will

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go uncompensated, such as in cases where it is impossible to identify the source of the spill. The legislation provides for a fund of up to \$200 million derived from a small fee on oil transported or stored on or near navigable waters.

This legislation would also implement two international conventions -- signed in 1969 and 1971 -- which provide remedies for oil pollution damage from ships. These conventions provide remedies for U.S. citizens under many circumstances where a ship discharging oil that reaches our shores might not otherwise be subject to our laws and courts. Protection of the international marine environment is basically an international problem since the waters, currents, and winds that spread and carry ocean pollution transcend all national boundaries.

In proposing implementation of the conventions, I am mindful of the fact that the Senate has not yet given its advice and consent to either of them. I urge such action without further delay. The 1969 convention came into force internationally on June 19, 1975, without our adherence, and the continuing failure of the United States to act on such initiatives may weaken or destroy the prospects of adequate international responses to marine pollution problems.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,

July 9, 1975.

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