

SUBCHAPTER I—OIL POLLUTION LIABILITY
AND COMPENSATION

§ 2701. Definitions

For the purposes of this Act, the term—

(1) “act of God” means an unanticipated grave natural disaster or other natural phenomenon of an exceptional, inevitable, and irresistible character the effects of which could not have been prevented or avoided by the exercise of due care or foresight;

(2) “barrel” means 42 United States gallons at 60 degrees fahrenheit;

(3) “claim” means a request, made in writing for a sum certain, for compensation for damages or removal costs resulting from an incident;

(4) “claimant” means any person or government who presents a claim for compensation under this subchapter;

(5) “damages” means damages specified in section 2702(b) of this title, and includes the cost of assessing these damages;

(6) “deepwater port” is a facility licensed under the Deepwater Port Act of 1974 (33 U.S.C. 1501–1524);

(7) “discharge” means any emission (other than natural seepage), intentional or unintentional, and includes, but is not limited to, spilling, leaking, pumping, pouring, emitting, emptying, or dumping;

(8) “exclusive economic zone” means the zone established by Presidential Proclamation Numbered 5030, dated March 10, 1983, including the ocean waters of the areas referred to as “eastern special areas” in Article 3(1) of the Agreement between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Maritime Boundary, signed June 1, 1990;

(9) “facility” means any structure, group of structures, equipment, or device (other than a vessel) which is used for one or more of the following purposes: exploring for, drilling for, producing, storing, handling, transferring, processing, or transporting oil. This term includes any motor vehicle, rolling stock, or pipeline used for one or more of these purposes;

(10) “foreign offshore unit” means a facility which is located, in whole or in part, in the territorial sea or on the continental shelf of a foreign country and which is or was used for one or more of the following purposes: exploring for, drilling for, producing, storing, handling, transferring, processing, or transporting oil produced from the seabed beneath the foreign country’s territorial sea or from the foreign country’s continental shelf;

(11) “Fund” means the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, established by section 9509 of title 26;

(12) “gross ton” has the meaning given that term by the Secretary under part J of title 46;

(13) “guarantor” means any person, other than the responsible party, who provides evidence of financial responsibility for a responsible party under this Act;

(14) “incident” means any occurrence or series of occurrences having the same origin, involving one or more vessels, facilities, or any

combination thereof, resulting in the discharge or substantial threat of discharge of oil;

(15) “Indian tribe” means any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, but not including any Alaska Native regional or village corporation, which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians and has governmental authority over lands belonging to or controlled by the tribe;

(16) “lessee” means a person holding a leasehold interest in an oil or gas lease on lands beneath navigable waters (as that term is defined in section 1301(a) of title 43) or on submerged lands of the Outer Continental Shelf, granted or maintained under applicable State law or the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.);

(17) “liable” or “liability” shall be construed to be the standard of liability which obtains under section 1321 of this title;

(18) “mobile offshore drilling unit” means a vessel (other than a self-elevating lift vessel) capable of use as an offshore facility;

(19) “National Contingency Plan” means the National Contingency Plan prepared and published under section 1321(d) of this title or revised under section 105 of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (42 U.S.C. 9605);

(20) “natural resources” includes land, fish, wildlife, biota, air, water, ground water, drinking water supplies, and other such resources belonging to, managed by, held in trust by, appertaining to, or otherwise controlled by the United States (including the resources of the exclusive economic zone), any State or local government or Indian tribe, or any foreign government;

(21) “navigable waters” means the waters of the United States, including the territorial sea;

(22) “offshore facility” means any facility of any kind located in, on, or under any of the navigable waters of the United States, and any facility of any kind which is subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and is located in, on, or under any other waters, other than a vessel or a public vessel;

(23) “oil” means oil of any kind or in any form, including petroleum, fuel oil, sludge, oil refuse, and oil mixed with wastes other than dredged spoil, but does not include any substance which is specifically listed or designated as a hazardous substance under subparagraphs (A) through (F) of section 101(14) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (42 U.S.C. 9601) and which is subject to the provisions of that Act [42 U.S.C. 9601 et seq.];

(24) “onshore facility” means any facility (including, but not limited to, motor vehicles and rolling stock) of any kind located in, on, or under, any land within the United States other than submerged land;

(25) the term “Outer Continental Shelf facility” means an offshore facility which is located, in whole or in part, on the Outer Continental Shelf and is or was used for one or

more of the following purposes: exploring for, drilling for, producing, storing, handling, transferring, processing, or transporting oil produced from the Outer Continental Shelf;

(26) “owner or operator”—

(A) means—

(i) in the case of a vessel, any person owning, operating, or chartering by demise, the vessel;

(ii) in the case of an onshore or offshore facility, any person owning or operating such facility;

(iii) in the case of any abandoned offshore facility, the person who owned or operated such facility immediately prior to such abandonment;

(iv) in the case of any facility, title or control of which was conveyed due to bankruptcy, foreclosure, tax delinquency, abandonment, or similar means to a unit of State or local government, any person who owned, operated, or otherwise controlled activities at such facility immediately beforehand;

(v) notwithstanding subparagraph (B)(i), and in the same manner and to the same extent, both procedurally and substantively, as any nongovernmental entity, including for purposes of liability under section 2702 of this title, any State or local government that has caused or contributed to a discharge or substantial threat of a discharge of oil from a vessel or facility ownership or control of which was acquired involuntarily through—

(I) seizure or otherwise in connection with law enforcement activity;

(II) bankruptcy;

(III) tax delinquency;

(IV) abandonment; or

(V) other circumstances in which the government involuntarily acquires title by virtue of its function as sovereign;

(vi) notwithstanding subparagraph (B)(ii), a person that is a lender and that holds indicia of ownership primarily to protect a security interest in a vessel or facility if, while the borrower is still in possession of the vessel or facility encumbered by the security interest, the person—

(I) exercises decision making control over the environmental compliance related to the vessel or facility, such that the person has undertaken responsibility for oil handling or disposal practices related to the vessel or facility; or

(II) exercises control at a level comparable to that of a manager of the vessel or facility, such that the person has assumed or manifested responsibility—

(aa) for the overall management of the vessel or facility encompassing day-to-day decision making with respect to environmental compliance; or

(bb) over all or substantially all of the operational functions (as distinguished from financial or administrative functions) of the vessel or facility other than the function of environmental compliance; and

(B) does not include—

(i) A unit of state or local government that acquired ownership or control of a vessel or facility involuntarily through—

(I) seizure or otherwise in connection with law enforcement activity;

(II) bankruptcy;

(III) tax delinquency;

(IV) abandonment; or

(V) other circumstances in which the government involuntarily acquires title by virtue of its function as sovereign;

(ii) a person that is a lender that does not participate in management of a vessel or facility, but holds indicia of ownership primarily to protect the security interest of the person in the vessel or facility; or

(iii) a person that is a lender that did not participate in management of a vessel or facility prior to foreclosure, notwithstanding that the person—

(I) forecloses on the vessel or facility; and

(II) after foreclosure, sells, re-leases (in the case of a lease finance transaction), or liquidates the vessel or facility, maintains business activities, winds up operations, undertakes a removal action under section 1321(c) of this title or under the direction of an on-scene coordinator appointed under the National Contingency Plan, with respect to the vessel or facility, or takes any other measure to preserve, protect, or prepare the vessel or facility prior to sale or disposition,

if the person seeks to sell, re-lease (in the case of a lease finance transaction), or otherwise divest the person of the vessel or facility at the earliest practicable, commercially reasonable time, on commercially reasonable terms, taking into account market conditions and legal and regulatory requirements;

(27) “person” means an individual, corporation, partnership, association, State, municipality, commission, or political subdivision of a State, or any interstate body;

(28) “permittee” means a person holding an authorization, license, or permit for geological exploration issued under section 11 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1340) or applicable State law;

(29) “public vessel” means a vessel owned or bareboat chartered and operated by the United States, or by a State or political subdivision thereof, or by a foreign nation, except when the vessel is engaged in commerce;

(30) “remove” or “removal” means containment and removal of oil or a hazardous substance from water and shorelines or the taking of other actions as may be necessary to minimize or mitigate damage to the public health or welfare, including, but not limited to, fish, shellfish, wildlife, and public and private property, shorelines, and beaches;

(31) “removal costs” means the costs of removal that are incurred after a discharge of oil has occurred or, in any case in which there is a substantial threat of a discharge of oil,

the costs to prevent, minimize, or mitigate oil pollution from such an incident;

(32) “responsible party” means the following:

(A) **VESSELS.**—In the case of a vessel, any person owning, operating, or demise chartering the vessel. In the case of a vessel, the term “responsible party” also includes the owner of oil being transported in a tank vessel with a single hull after December 31, 2010 (other than a vessel described in section 3703a(b)(3) of title 46).

(B) **ONSHORE FACILITIES.**—In the case of an onshore facility (other than a pipeline), any person owning or operating the facility, except a Federal agency, State, municipality, commission, or political subdivision of a State, or any interstate body, that as the owner transfers possession and right to use the property to another person by lease, assignment, or permit.

(C) **OFFSHORE FACILITIES.**—In the case of an offshore facility (other than a pipeline or a deepwater port licensed under the Deepwater Port Act of 1974 (33 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.)), the lessee or permittee of the area in which the facility is located or the holder of a right of use and easement granted under applicable State law or the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1301–1356) for the area in which the facility is located (if the holder is a different person than the lessee or permittee), except a Federal agency, State, municipality, commission, or political subdivision of a State, or any interstate body, that as owner transfers possession and right to use the property to another person by lease, assignment, or permit.

(D) **DEEPWATER PORTS.**—In the case of a deepwater port licensed under the Deepwater Port Act of 1974 (33 U.S.C. 1501–1524), the licensee.

(E) **PIPELINES.**—In the case of a pipeline, any person owning or operating the pipeline.

(F) **ABANDONMENT.**—In the case of an abandoned vessel, onshore facility, deepwater port, pipeline, or offshore facility, the persons who would have been responsible parties immediately prior to the abandonment of the vessel or facility.

(33) “Secretary” means the Secretary of the department in which the Coast Guard is operating;

(34) “tank vessel” means a vessel that is constructed or adapted to carry, or that carries, oil or hazardous material in bulk as cargo or cargo residue, and that—

(A) is a vessel of the United States;

(B) operates on the navigable waters; or

(C) transfers oil or hazardous material in a place subject to the jurisdiction of the United States;

(35) “territorial seas” means the belt of the seas measured from the line of ordinary low water along that portion of the coast which is in direct contact with the open sea and the line marking the seaward limit of inland waters, and extending seaward a distance of 3 miles;

(36) “United States” and “State” mean the several States of the United States, the Dis-

trict of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, and any other territory or possession of the United States;

(37) “vessel” means every description of watercraft or other artificial contrivance used, or capable of being used, as a means of transportation on water, other than a public vessel;

(38) “participate in management”—

(A)(i) means actually participating in the management or operational affairs of a vessel or facility; and

(ii) does not include merely having the capacity to influence, or the unexercised right to control, vessel or facility operations; and

(B) does not include—

(i) performing an act or failing to act prior to the time at which a security interest is created in a vessel or facility;

(ii) holding a security interest or abandoning or releasing a security interest;

(iii) including in the terms of an extension of credit, or in a contract or security agreement relating to the extension, a covenant, warranty, or other term or condition that relates to environmental compliance;

(iv) monitoring or enforcing the terms and conditions of the extension of credit or security interest;

(v) monitoring or undertaking one or more inspections of the vessel or facility;

(vi) requiring a removal action or other lawful means of addressing a discharge or substantial threat of a discharge of oil in connection with the vessel or facility prior to, during, or on the expiration of the term of the extension of credit;

(vii) providing financial or other advice or counseling in an effort to mitigate, prevent, or cure default or diminution in the value of the vessel or facility;

(viii) restructuring, renegotiating, or otherwise agreeing to alter the terms and conditions of the extension of credit or security interest, exercising forbearance;

(ix) exercising other remedies that may be available under applicable law for the breach of a term or condition of the extension of credit or security agreement; or

(x) conducting a removal action under section 1321(c) of this title or under the direction of an on-scene coordinator appointed under the National Contingency Plan,

if such actions do not rise to the level of participating in management under subparagraph (A) of this paragraph and paragraph (26)(A)(vi);

(39) “extension of credit” has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(i) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(i));

(40) “financial or administrative function” has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(ii) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(ii));

(41) “foreclosure” and “foreclose” each has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(iii) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(iii));

(42) “lender” has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(iv) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(iv));

(43) “operational function” has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(v) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(v)); and

(44) “security interest” has the meaning provided in section 101(20)(G)(vi) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601(20)(G)(vi)).

(Pub. L. 101-380, title I, §1001, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 486; Pub. L. 105-383, title III, §307(a), Nov. 13, 1998, 112 Stat. 3421; Pub. L. 108-293, title VII, §703(a), (b), Aug. 9, 2004, 118 Stat. 1069, 1071; Pub. L. 111-281, title VII, §713, Oct. 15, 2010, 124 Stat. 2988.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

This Act, referred to in text, is Pub. L. 101-380, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 484, as amended, known as the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out below and Tables.

The Deepwater Port Act of 1974, referred to in pars. (6) and (32)(C), (D), is Pub. L. 93-627, Jan. 3, 1975, 88 Stat. 2126, as amended, which is classified generally to chapter 29 (§1501 et seq.) of this title. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 1501 of this title and Tables.

Presidential Proclamation Numbered 5030, referred to in par. (8), is Proc. No. 5030, Mar. 10, 1983, 48 F.R. 10605, which is set out as a note under section 1453 of Title 16, Conservation.

The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, referred to in pars. (16) and (32)(C), is act Aug. 7, 1953, ch. 345, 67 Stat. 462, as amended, which is classified generally to subchapter III (§1331 et seq.) of chapter 29 of Title 43, Public Lands. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 1331 of Title 43 and Tables.

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, referred to in par. (23), probably means the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, Pub. L. 96-510, Dec. 11, 1980, 94 Stat. 2767, as amended, which is classified principally to chapter 103 (§9601 et seq.) of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 9601 of Title 42 and Tables.

AMENDMENTS

2010—Par. (32)(A). Pub. L. 111-281 inserted “In the case of a vessel, the term ‘responsible party’ also includes the owner of oil being transported in a tank vessel with a single hull after December 31, 2010 (other than a vessel described in section 3703a(b)(3) of title 46).” after “chartering the vessel.”

2004—Par. (26). Pub. L. 108-293, §703(a), amended par. (26) generally. Prior to amendment, par. (26) read as follows: “‘owner or operator’ means (A) in the case of a vessel, any person owning, operating, or chartering by demise, the vessel, and (B) in the case of an onshore facility, and an offshore facility, any person owning or operating such onshore facility or offshore facility, and (C) in the case of any abandoned offshore facility, the person who owned or operated such facility immediately prior to such abandonment;”.

Pars. (38) to (44). Pub. L. 108-293, §703(b), added pars. (38) to (44).

1998—Par. (23). Pub. L. 105-383 amended par. (23) generally. Prior to amendment, par. (23) read as follows: “‘oil’ means oil of any kind or in any form, including, but not limited to, petroleum, fuel oil, sludge, oil refuse, and oil mixed with wastes other than dredged spoil, but does not include petroleum, including crude oil or any fraction thereof, which is specifically listed or designated as a hazardous substance under subparagraphs (A) through (F) of section 101(14) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (42 U.S.C. 9601) and which is subject to the provisions of that Act;”.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 101-380, title I, §1020, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 506, provided that: “This Act [see Short Title of 1990 Amendments note below for classification] shall apply to an incident occurring after the date of the enactment of this Act [Aug. 18, 1990].”

SHORT TITLE OF 2006 AMENDMENT

Pub. L. 109-241, title VI, §601, July 11, 2006, 120 Stat. 553, provided that: “This title [enacting sections 1232b and 2762 of this title, amending sections 1321, 2704, and 2761 of this title, and enacting provisions set out as notes under section 2704 of this title] may be cited as the ‘Delaware River Protection Act of 2006’.”

SHORT TITLE OF 1995 AMENDMENT

Pub. L. 104-55, §1, Nov. 20, 1995, 109 Stat. 546, provided that: “This Act [enacting section 2720 of this title and amending sections 2704 and 2716 of this title] may be cited as the ‘Edible Oil Regulatory Reform Act’.”

SHORT TITLE OF 1990 AMENDMENTS

Pub. L. 101-537, title II, §2001, Nov. 8, 1990, 104 Stat. 2375, and Pub. L. 101-646, title IV, §4001, Nov. 29, 1990, 104 Stat. 4788, as amended by Pub. L. 104-332, §2(h)(1), Oct. 26, 1996, 110 Stat. 4091, provided that: “This title [amending section 2761 of this title] may be cited as the ‘Great Lakes Oil Pollution Research and Development Act’.”

SHORT TITLE

Pub. L. 101-380, §1, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 484, provided that: “This Act [enacting this chapter, sections 1642 and 1656 of Title 43, Public Lands, sections 3703a and 7505 of Title 46, Shipping, and section 1274a of the Appendix to Title 46, amending sections 1223, 1228, 1232, 1236, 1319, 1321, 1481, 1486, 1503, 1514, and 1908 of this title, section 3145 of Title 16, Conservation, sections 4612 and 9509 of Title 26, Internal Revenue Code, sections 1334, 1350, and 1653 of Title 43, sections 2101, 2302, 3318, 3715, 3718, 5116, 6101, 7101, 7106, 7107, 7109, 7302, 7502, 7503, 7701 to 7703, 8101, 8104, 8502, 8503, 8702, 9101, 9102, 9302, 9308, and 12106 of Title 46, and section 1274 of the Appendix to Title 46, repealing section 1517 of this title and sections 1811 and 1812 to 1824 of Title 43, enacting provisions set out as notes under this section, sections 1203, 1223, and 1321, of this title, section 92 of Title 14, Coast Guard, section 9509 of Title 26, sections 1334, 1651, and 1653 of Title 43, sections 3703, 3703a, and 7106 of Title 46, and section 1295 of the Appendix to Title 46, amending provisions set out as a note under section 401 of Title 23, Highways, and repealing provisions set out as a note under section 1811 of Title 43] may be cited as the ‘Oil Pollution Act of 1990’.”

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS

For transfer of authorities, functions, personnel, and assets of the Coast Guard, including the authorities and functions of the Secretary of Transportation relating thereto, to the Department of Homeland Security, and for treatment of related references, see sections 468(b), 551(d), 552(d), and 557 of Title 6, Domestic Security, and the Department of Homeland Security Reor-

ganization Plan of November 25, 2002, as modified, set out as a note under section 542 of Title 6.

§ 2702. Elements of liability

(a) In general

Notwithstanding any other provision or rule of law, and subject to the provisions of this Act, each responsible party for a vessel or a facility from which oil is discharged, or which poses the substantial threat of a discharge of oil, into or upon the navigable waters or adjoining shorelines or the exclusive economic zone is liable for the removal costs and damages specified in subsection (b) of this section that result from such incident.

(b) Covered removal costs and damages

(1) Removal costs

The removal costs referred to in subsection (a) of this section are—

(A) all removal costs incurred by the United States, a State, or an Indian tribe under subsection (c), (d), (e), or (f) of section 1321 of this title, under the Intervention on the High Seas Act (33 U.S.C. 1471 et seq.), or under State law; and

(B) any removal costs incurred by any person for acts taken by the person which are consistent with the National Contingency Plan.

(2) Damages

The damages referred to in subsection (a) of this section are the following:

(A) Natural resources

Damages for injury to, destruction of, loss of, or loss of use of, natural resources, including the reasonable costs of assessing the damage, which shall be recoverable by a United States trustee, a State trustee, an Indian tribe trustee, or a foreign trustee.

(B) Real or personal property

Damages for injury to, or economic losses resulting from destruction of, real or personal property, which shall be recoverable by a claimant who owns or leases that property.

(C) Subsistence use

Damages for loss of subsistence use of natural resources, which shall be recoverable by any claimant who so uses natural resources which have been injured, destroyed, or lost, without regard to the ownership or management of the resources.

(D) Revenues

Damages equal to the net loss of taxes, royalties, rents, fees, or net profit shares due to the injury, destruction, or loss of real property, personal property, or natural resources, which shall be recoverable by the Government of the United States, a State, or a political subdivision thereof.

(E) Profits and earning capacity

Damages equal to the loss of profits or impairment of earning capacity due to the injury, destruction, or loss of real property, personal property, or natural resources, which shall be recoverable by any claimant.

(F) Public services

Damages for net costs of providing increased or additional public services during or after removal activities, including protection from fire, safety, or health hazards, caused by a discharge of oil, which shall be recoverable by a State, or a political subdivision of a State.

(c) Excluded discharges

This subchapter does not apply to any discharge—

(1) permitted by a permit issued under Federal, State, or local law;

(2) from a public vessel; or

(3) from an onshore facility which is subject to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act (43 U.S.C. 1651 et seq.).

(d) Liability of third parties

(1) In general

(A) Third party treated as responsible party

Except as provided in subparagraph (B), in any case in which a responsible party establishes that a discharge or threat of a discharge and the resulting removal costs and damages were caused solely by an act or omission of one or more third parties described in section 2703(a)(3) of this title (or solely by such an act or omission in combination with an act of God or an act of war), the third party or parties shall be treated as the responsible party or parties for purposes of determining liability under this subchapter.

(B) Subrogation of responsible party

If the responsible party alleges that the discharge or threat of a discharge was caused solely by an act or omission of a third party, the responsible party—

(i) in accordance with section 2713 of this title, shall pay removal costs and damages to any claimant; and

(ii) shall be entitled by subrogation to all rights of the United States Government and the claimant to recover removal costs or damages from the third party or the Fund paid under this subsection.

(2) Limitation applied

(A) Owner or operator of vessel or facility

If the act or omission of a third party that causes an incident occurs in connection with a vessel or facility owned or operated by the third party, the liability of the third party shall be subject to the limits provided in section 2704 of this title as applied with respect to the vessel or facility.

(B) Other cases

In any other case, the liability of a third party or parties shall not exceed the limitation which would have been applicable to the responsible party of the vessel or facility from which the discharge actually occurred if the responsible party were liable.

(Pub. L. 101-380, title I, § 1002, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 489.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

This Act, referred to in subsec. (a), is Pub. L. 101-380, Aug. 18, 1990, 104 Stat. 484, as amended, known as the