Oil Record Book — study guide

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The Oil Record Book is the legal record of every oil operation on board — and the document that most often sends seafarers to court when it is falsified. This guide covers the requirement, the entries and the consequences of errors.[1]

Scale and sources of oil pollution

Every year, oil tankers transport around **2,400 million** tonnes of crude oil and oil products around the globe. Oil enters the seas and oceans from many sources: releases from petroleum extraction, marine recreational vehicles, accidental and exceptional discharges, watersheds draining heavily polluted areas, runoff from land-based activities such as construction and farming, operational discharges such as cargo washings, and jettisoned aircraft fuel. **90%** of oil discharges are down to low-level releases associated with the extraction and consumption of petroleum.

The record book itself

The Oil Record Book must be preserved for **3 years** after the last entry has been made. **Part 1** must be completed when collecting and disposing of oil residues; when discharging overboard or disposing; when ballasting or cleaning oil fuel tanks; and when discharging dirty ballast or cleaning water from oil fuel tanks. An electronic record book must meet system specifications addressing data storage, system updates, the ability to meet MARPOL regulations, security and accountability.

How entries are made

All entries must be recorded with accuracy, completed and signed **without delay** by the officer in charge who performed the operation, kept readily available for inspection at all times, and checked and signed on each page by the **Master**. Every entry should include the code letter indicating the type of disposal, the signature of the officer in charge, the name of the ship, the coordinates where the disposal was made, the IMO number, the date of discharge, and an item number.

Consequences

Errors in the Oil Record Book can lead to vessel detentions, expensive and lengthy court battles, damage to the ship operator's reputation, and career damage to, and criminal prosecution of, seafarers. The paper record book has its own challenges: it is time-consuming, carries a heavy paperwork and administrative burden, and is inefficient.

Key facts to remember

- ~2,400 million tonnes of oil transported by tankers per year; 90% of oil discharges are low-level releases.

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- Preserve the Oil Record Book for 3 years after the last entry.
- Part 1: residue collection/disposal, overboard discharge, ballasting/cleaning of fuel tanks, dirty ballast water.
- Entries: accurate, signed without delay by the officer in charge, kept available, each page signed by the Master.
- Every entry: code letter, officer's signature, ship's name, coordinates, IMO number, date, item number.
- Errors → detention, court battles, reputation damage, prosecution of seafarers. Electronic book must meet MARPOL specs.

Sources

1. IMO MARPOL Annex I — Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Oil (Oil Record Book Parts I and II and record retention).