



Standard Guide for In-Situ Burning of Oil in Ships or Other Vessels¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers the use of in-situ burning directly in ships and other vessels. This guide is not applicable to in-situ burning of oil on sea or land.

1.2 This guide is applicable to situations in which the vessel and cargo are not salvageable. After the burn, the vessel will never be salvageable. It is intended that the in-situ burning of oil spills in ships be a last resort option.

1.3 The purpose of this guide is to provide information that will enable spill responders to decide if burning will be used to remove oil from stranded ships or other vessels.

1.4 This is a general guide only. It is assumed that conditions at the spill site have been assessed and that these conditions are suitable for the burning of oil. It is also assumed that permissions to burn the oil have been obtained. Variations in the behavior of different oil types are not dealt with and may change some of the parameters noted in this guide.

1.5 This guide is one of several related to in-situ burning.

1.6 There are many safety concerns associated with in-situ burning of oil in ships. These include the unsafe nature of the wrecked vessel and the use of explosives.

1.7 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

F1788 Guide for In-Situ Burning of Oil Spills on Water: Environmental and Operational Considerations

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F20 on Hazardous Substances and Oil Spill Response and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F20.15 on In-Situ Burning.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

F1990 Guide for In-Situ Burning of Spilled Oil: Ignition Devices

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 *burn rate, n*—the rate at which oil is burned in a given area. Typically the area is a pool and burn rate is the regression rate of the burning liquid, or may be described as a volumetric rate.

3.1.2 *burn efficiency, n*—burn efficiency is the percentage of the oil removed from the water by the burning. This is the amount (volume) of oil before burning; less the volume remaining as a residue, divided by the initial volume of the oil.

3.1.3 *coking, n*—coking is the formation of coke, a hardened charcoal-like material. Coke is often formed when a hydrocarbon such as oil is heated in absence of sufficient oxygen to burn completely.

3.1.4 *contact probability, n*—the probability that oil will be contacted by the flame during burning.

3.1.5 *controlled burning, n*—burning when the combustion can be started and stopped by human intervention.

3.1.6 *eruption, n*—sudden upwelling of boiling oil in a tank due to specific area heating.

3.1.7 *fire-resistant booms, n*—devices which float on water to restrict the spreading and movement of oil slicks and constructed to withstand the high temperatures and heat fluxes of in-situ burning.

3.1.8 *in-situ burning, n*—use of burning directly on the water surface. In-situ burning does not include incineration techniques, whereby oil or oiled debris are placed into an incinerator.

3.1.9 *in-situ burning in ships, n*—use of burning on or in a ship.

3.1.10 *residue, n*—the material, excluding airborne emissions, remaining after the oil stops burning.

3.1.11 *salvageable, adj*—a condition of the vessel such that it is economical and feasible to recover, refurbish and return to operation or to re-use portions of the vessel.

3.1.12 *seaworthy, adj*—a condition of the vessel such that it is fit and safe for sea voyage.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This guide is primarily intended to aid decision-makers and spill-responders in contingency planning, spill response, and training.

4.2 This guide is general and site conditions can change the situation considerably.

5. Background

5.1 *Overview of Oil Burning*—In-situ burning is one of several oil spill countermeasures available. The thickness of the oil is an important factor in the use of in-situ burning (see Guide [F1788](#)). The burning of oil in ships is implemented to remove oil from stranded or derelict ships to minimize the release of oil.

5.2 *Major Advantages and Disadvantages of Burning in Ships*

5.2.1 *Advantages of In-Situ Burning Include:*

5.2.1.1 May provide a net environmental benefit by quickly reducing the potential for oil release into the marine environment;

5.2.1.2 In remote locations it may be the only feasible solution;

5.2.1.3 A significant reduction in the amount of material requiring disposal;

5.2.1.4 A significant removal of volatile emission components;

5.2.1.5 Removal of oil from the ship.

5.2.2 *Disadvantages of Burning in Ships Include:*

5.2.2.1 The fire will weaken the ship hull and the ship could break up, releasing oil or residue;

5.2.2.2 Creation of a smoke plume;

5.2.2.3 Residues of the burn may be problematic;

5.2.2.4 The ship may have to be prepared such as by the use of explosives to ensure that the oil is presented to the burn and that there is sufficient ventilation;

5.2.2.5 The fire could spread to other combustible materials.

6. Limitations to Burning in Ships

6.1 *Access to Oil*—The oil must be accessible to ignition and accessible to air. Explosives are used to allow oil to flow from tanks to spaces where it will be burned and to increase ventilation area. This should be conducted by salvage and explosive experts. Typically, the planned burn would take place in the ship's hold(s) and explosives would be used to open passage from lubrication and fuel tanks to the hold. Lubrication and fuel tanks generally do not have sufficient exposure to the air to allow for burning.

6.2 *Ventilation*—Oxygen from air is necessary for burning. Studies have shown the area of ventilation is a critical regulating factor in the burning of oil directly on ships and in other confined spaces. The rate of burning is generally calculated based on the area of ventilation openings in the case of low wind situations. Studies have shown that top and side openings combined will yield better ventilation than top openings alone. The presence of two openings allows for air circulation over the area of fire. Small scale studies have shown that a minimum of 10 % ventilation is needed to prevent

extensive coking. The 10 % refers to the area of ventilation compared to the surface area of oil available to burn. An area of more than 20 % ventilation has been shown to result in little coking during test burns.

6.3 *External Wind Speed*—External winds assist in providing additional ventilation, despite the semi-closed conditions that may exist. Burn efficiency increases and prevention of coking will also be a positive result of higher wind conditions. One study showed a three-fold increase in burn rate with wind increase from 0 to 11 m/s.

6.4 *Coking*—Coking is the formation of a hard, carbonaceous material during burning in a low oxygen environment. Coking is more prevalent with heavy residual oils. If coking occurs, the burn rate slows considerably as coke itself burns poorly, if at all, and the coke would prevent the flame from contacting oil under it. Coking is prevented by having sufficient ventilation.

6.5 *Ability to Ignite*—A consideration for in-ship burning is the ability to ignite the oil. There are some oils which are difficult to ignite and which may not sustain combustion (see Guide [F1990](#)). Successful ignition will depend on the type of oil, degree of ventilation, heat of ignition and length of time that ignition must be applied. Heavier oils will require application of heat for at least several minutes. Ventilation is required to sustain efficient combustion. The burning of the ignitor will deplete the oxygen in a given area if there is insufficient ventilation. Heavy bunker fuels have been successfully ignited in ships' holds using diesel fuel as a primer. A layer of 2 mm of diesel fuel has been shown to be sufficient during test burns.

6.6 *Eruption*—During the burn process, some localized oil may become super-heated. When the heating is sufficient, flash evaporation of a component of this oil may occur and the surrounding boiling oil can erupt upwards towards the top ventilation port. This could result in oil being splashed onto other parts of the vessel or sea. This phenomenon has been observed in test situations with crude oil.

7. Operational Considerations for Burning in Ships

7.1 *Safety Considerations*—The safety of the proposed operation will be the primary consideration. The vessel should be stable and relatively stationary during the preparation and burn phases. The operation should only be contemplated if the operation will not result in flashback to other sources of fuel. The fire should be prevented from spreading to other combustible material in the area, including trees, docks, and buildings. Situation-specific contingency methods of extinguishing or protection should be available. Further, escaping oil could pose a risk. The possibility that burning oil may erupt should be considered.

7.2 *Effects on the Ship's Structure*—Preparation of the vessel for burning by using explosives and subsequent burning of the oil will weaken the ship's structure. Burning in ships should be considered only if there is no potential for future salvage of the vessel or if the trade-off between future salvage potential and removing the oil is favorable. The use of explosives and burning may weaken the structure sufficiently to result in