national highways

Diesel spillages

Best practice guide for commercial vehicle drivers and operators

February 2026

Contents

1. Introduction

National Highways is responsible for managing and maintaining the strategic road network (SRN) in England. The SRN is 4,500 miles of motorways and major A roads and constitutes 2.4% of the road network in England. The network carries one third of all traffic and two thirds of all freight.

Road safety is, and will always be, our number one priority. England's motorways and major A roads are some of the safest in the world, but our ambition remains that no-one should be harmed while travelling or working on our roads.

When a diesel spillage occurs on the SRN it can have a significant financial, environmental and economic impact on those directly involved, other drivers and the UK economy.

1.1 What is the purpose of this guide?

The aim of this guide is to:

- Increase awareness of the impact of diesel spillages
- Provide guidance for drivers and operators about what can be done to help prevent diesel spills and
- Inform what actions should be taken in a diesel spillage incident.

Who is it for?

This guide is aimed at commercial vehicle drivers and operators.

Operators and drivers of other vehicles may also find the information useful contained within this guide.

How should this guide be used?

This guide should be used as a source of information to help establish, or update processes for preventing and managing diesel spills. There are driver handouts at the back of this guide which provide an easy to follow summary and step-by-step approach to managing diesel spillages. These should be handed to your drivers as part of their Health and Safety/PPE pack and kept in the cab until needed.

1.2 What are the impacts of diesel spills?

Potential impacts of diesel spills on the SRN include:

- Disruption and delays caused by lane closures while a spill is cleaned up
- The risk of secondary incidents caused by a slippery road surface
- Risk of diesel entering the water course and causing environmental damage
- The costs of cleaning, road surface repairs and resurfacing
- Risk to other road users, in particular motorcyclists.

In 2025 National Highways recorded 303 diesel spillages involving HGVs.

(Source: National Highways Control Works data)

Between 2020 and 2024 motorcyclists made up 36% of the casualties in collisions on England's motorways and major A-road where there was a deposit on the road and oil, diesel or mud was recorded as a hazard.

(Source: DfT: Stats19)

1.3 What are the root causes of diesel spillages?

Research conducted by TRL (2010)[1] indicates that the root causes of diesel spills are due to one or a combination of factors including:

- Road traffic collision (RTC) with other road user
- Fuel filler cap not fully secure/closed properly
- Fuel filler cap damaged or missing
- Filling the fuel tank right up to the filler cap (necking it)
- Lack of anti-spill devices being fitted into the tank
- Mechanical failures and fuel system defects
- Problems encountered during the transportation of fuel
- Ruptured tanks
- Leakage from a corroded or rusty tank.

[1] Transport Research Laboratory. (2010).Review of diesel spillage clean-up procedures. pp3

1.4 How does National Highways manage diesel spills?

What happens when a spill occurs?

When diesel is spilt it quickly reacts and begins to degrade the road surface meaning the time taken to contain the spill is important. Diesel left on the road surface for as little as two hours can lead to structural damage of the surface. The length of time it takes to contain and treat a diesel spill increases the likelihood of damage to the road surface and the contamination of water systems.

When we respond to a fuel spillage on our roads, information is collected at the scene by our traffic officers and includes the date, time, location and duration of the incident, vehicles involved and preliminary information of the damage caused to infrastructure. Traffic officers are equipped to treat spillages up to 50 litres. Where the spillage exceeds this, maintenance and response teams will be required to attend and assess.

What does National Highways do with the information recorded at the scene?

All the collected information is stored in a secure database and can be used to see if we can recover any clean-up costs.

Can drivers and operators be held accountable for diesel spillages?

In our Incident Prevention Study[2], we found that operators who have not been involved in a diesel spillage incident in the past are not fully aware of the potential costs associated with diesel spills and may not have invested in spillage protection equipment or have plans in place to prevent and control spills.

Liability for costs related to the management and cleaning up of spills is the responsibility of the company, or individual driver, who allowed the spillage to occur.

We are able to recover the costs, via insurance, from fleet operators that are found to be responsible for diesel spillages. The size of the cost is dependent on the size of the spill and the extent of the repairs necessary to restore the condition of the road.

Drivers can also be prosecuted under Section 161(1) of the Highways Act 1980, which carries a fine of up to £1,000. Diesel spillage related fines issued by DVSA can amount to £50 - £300 non endorsable fine or £100 - £200 endorsable fine and three penalty points on your driving licence, depending on the severity of the offence. Fines for operators can be considerably more.

Additionally, fines from the Environment Agency can be unlimited upon conviction.

[2] Highways England. (2017). Incident Prevention Study

1.5 What is the escalation process for dealing with spillages?

The escalation process from the point the diesel spills onto the road to completion of clean up:

Step 1

Incident

- Spillage of diesel or other vehicle fluids, such as hydraulic oil, occurs on the SRN

Step 2

Driver

- Driver calls emergency services / National Highways
- Ideally the driver contains the spill using a portable container, putty or booms and mats

Step 3

National Highways traffic officer

- National Highways traffic officer arrives / implements traffic management
- Size of the spill assessed - if less than 50 litres, absorbent materials used to treat the spillage
- If the spill is greater than 50 litres, traffic officer contacts asset delivery for maintenance and response team to attend

Step 4

Maintenance service provider

- Maintenance and response team arrives and cleans the road surface with bio-remediation solutions that leave no detrimental affects to the environmental and habitat
- Maintenance service provider resurfaces road if required

2. Guidance for drivers

2.1 What are the benefits of preventing and controlling diesel spills

1. Road safety

Diesel spills create slippery road conditions, increasing braking distances and the risk of skidding.

This can be especially hazardous on curves, slip roads, roundabouts, and creates an increased risk to motorcyclists.

2. Protect the environment

Diesel is a contaminant and can cause serious environmental harm. Any spillage, regardless of size, can have significant consequences. Diesel floats on water and if it gets into groundwater and enters the drainage system it can flow into nearby streams or rivers, where environmental impacts could endanger local wildlife and vegetation.

3. Reduce congestion

In 2025, there were 303 diesel spillage incidents on the SRN.

Diesel spillage incidents often lead to lengthy delays, especially in cases where carriageway resurfacing is required. In cases where immediate resurfacing is not required, the life of the road surface is compromised, meaning it will likely need to be resurfaced sooner.

4. Save money

If a vehicle defect is found to have caused a spillage, you could be issued with a fixed penalty notice or fined up to £1000 by the Police or DVSA. Typical issues resulting in a fine include:

- Leakage from tank
- Filler cap missing or defective
- Diesel fuel leak from defect
- Fuel system insecure and danger is caused or likely to be caused.

2.2 What things can drivers do to prevent diesel spillages?

Identifying the potential cause of a diesel spill before it happens benefits both a driver and their company. This can be done by carrying out simple daily checks to your vehicle.

The DVSA's guidance on how to carry out an effective walkaround check is available on the DVSA's website: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/carry-out-daily-heavy-goods-vehicle-hgv-walkaround-checks.

To avoid diesel spills caused by overfilling, drivers should stop at the first click when refuelling.

Section 45 of DVSA's heavy goods vehicle (HGV) inspection manual, outlines deficiencies and deficiency categorisation in relation to fuel tanks and system (see table below):

Fuel tanks and system	
Deficiency	Deficiency category
1. **Fuel tank**	
a. strap or support broken or missing	Major
b. so insecure on its mountings that it is likely to drop away partially or completely when the vehicle is used	Dangerous
c. heat shield missing, or defective to such an extent it constitutes an obvious fire risk	Dangerous
d. defective such that leakage of fuel is possible	Major
2. **Fuel system**	
a. (i) leaking and does not represent an obvious hazard to other road users	Major
(ii) leaking and represents an obvious hazard to other road users	Dangerous
b. (i) pipes damaged (restricted/chafed) or so positioned that they are fouled by moving parts of the vehicle	Minor
(ii) pipes so damaged (restricted/chafed), insecure or with an inadequate repair, such that they are likely to fail and leak which would cause danger to persons on the vehicle or to other road users	Major
3. **Filler cap**	
a. Missing	Dangerous
b. does not fasten securely:	Major
- by a positive means, or	
- such that pressure is not maintained on the sealing arrangement	
c. sealing washer torn, deteriorated or missing, or a mounting flange/ sealing method defective such that leakage of fuel is possible	Major

2.3 What actions should a driver take if they are involved in a spillage?

Commercial vehicle operators and drivers should have a spill response plan in place, which sets out the actions, roles and responsibilities if a diesel spillage occurs.

A typical spill response plan has four stages:

1) Access

2) Contain

3) Communicate

4) Record

1. Assess

During this stage the driver should:

i. Check for safety

- Make sure you and any passengers are safe - check for hazards
- Identify anyone who may be in danger or in need of medical attention and contact the emergency services immediately (if required).

ii. Risk assess the spillage

- Is fuel loss continuing or has it stopped?
- Is there a risk of fire? Look for an ignition source such as a naked flame.
- Is the smell overpowering? If you start to feel dizzy or have a headache, move away from the area. Confined spaces can be particularly hazardous, with limited ventilation in tunnels.
- What is the nature/size of the spill?
  Is this something you can deal with yourself or will you need assistance?
- If there is a risk of the spill spreading onto areas where people of vehicles are likely to pass call the emergency services immediately.
- After completing your risk assessment, if you decide you cannot deal with the spill yourself, follow your company's emergency incident procedures (company specific). These will include emergency contact details and reporting procedures.

2. Contain

It is recommended commercial vehicle operators have spill kits in their vehicles and that drivers are familiar with the contents of the spill kit and know how to use it.

A spill kit can comprise of portable containers, booms and mats and sealant putty. It is important that drivers know how to use different parts of the kit correctly.

Equipment used to contain spillages includes:

i. Portable containers

- Put portable containers under fuel tanks to collect diesel as it leaks out.

ii. Booms and mats

- Place booms around the entire circumference of the spill and in or around any nearby gullies or drainage channels to stop it from spreading. Once this is done use mats to soak up the rest of the spillage.

iii. Use sealant putty

- Use sealant putty to plug the hole(s)

3. Communicate

i. Inform your transport office

- Provide them with information about the incident
- If possible, give them your exact coordinates (use Google Maps, GPS or telematics if possible)

4. Record

i. Take photographs or make sketches (where safe to do so) of the incident scene

ii. Take note of:

- incident details such as, date, time, location (including road type and layout)
- third party/s details (including vehicle details if any involved)
- witness details (if available)
- damage to vehicles and property (including old damage that might already be present)
- other details such as weather conditions, visibility, road surface condition, lighting (street and vehicle), your speed at the time of the incident, speed of the other vehicle/s (if any involved).

2.4 What training is available?

Operators should provide a health and safety briefing with a section on the subject of diesel spillages.

Drivers should explore their company policy and refer them to this guide if necessary. There are courses available and some of the Driver CPC (HGV Drivers) modules cover spillages.

National Highways Safer Vehicles and Safer People Driver Education CPC modules

3. Guidance for operators

3.1 What can operators do to prevent diesel spills?

The process of cleaning up a diesel spillage can be very expensive and time consuming. It is estimated 41% of spillage incidents are estimated to last less than two hours. 14% of spillage incidents last between two to five hours and 22% of incidents last in excess of five hours (there was no timed record of the other 23%)[3].

Our data shows that the cost of delay to the economy of an incident lasting for four hours on a busy route equates to over £500,000[4].

Poorly maintained HGVs are more likely to break down and suffer from engine oil or diesel leaks. HGV downtime can cause operational issues for fleet operators and can result in large repair bills and late or failed deliveries. This in turn can lead to fines from customers.

In addition there are fines issued by DVSA for commercial vehicle drivers and fleet operators for failure to maintain the fuel system.

Our survey of over 200 operators revealed that 42% of fleet operators did not equip their vehicles with spill kits. If they are involved in a spillage incident it would remain untreated until a response unit arrives.
(Source: Incident prevention study 2017)

A fleet operator can help to reduce the likelihood of being involved in a diesel spillage incident by ensuring their vehicles are roadworthy by keeping up-to-date with their vehicle servicing and maintenance schedules and reviewing driver defect information.

Diesel exposure for as little as 120 minutes has been shown to result in structural damage to road surfaces[5]

[3] FMG. 2013: Fuel Tanks in LGV's Presentation Slide 8

[4] Atkins. 2015: Commercial Vehicle Incident Prevention Strategy Outline Business Case. pp. 25

[5] J C Bullas, J Doxford, & P Hupton. Star. 2014: A study of measurement methods for diesel sorbent performance, and the components of road user delay associated with diesel spills on the UK SRN. pp 3

3.2 What additional safety measures are available?

There are a number of aftermarket products available that can help reduce the likelihood of a fuel spillage occurring.

Fuel caps

Anti–syphon devices that can be used to aid against spillage and are available as standard on most “newer” commercial vehicles.

Anti-syphon fuel cap with spill aid

The fuel cap sits on top of or as part of the anti-syphon device (slides away or attached via a chain). The holes in the device stops fuel being extracted through a funnel entering the tank and thus reduce spilling from diesel thefts.

The device also significantly reduces the amount of “splash back” from refuelling with the fuel dispersing through the holes.

Guard rails

The primary purpose of a guard rail is to help prevent vulnerable road users from going underneath the vehicle, but they can also be used to protect the fuel tank.

With articulated vehicles, in the vast majority of cases, the separable tractor unit does not have any guard rails fitted which leaves the fuel tank exposed. Vehicle operators have the option to add the guard rail when ordering a new tractor unit.

Positioning of guard rails on articulated vehicle (not protecting the fuel tank)

Some operators have added side panels as an after market adaptation to help protect the fuel tank.

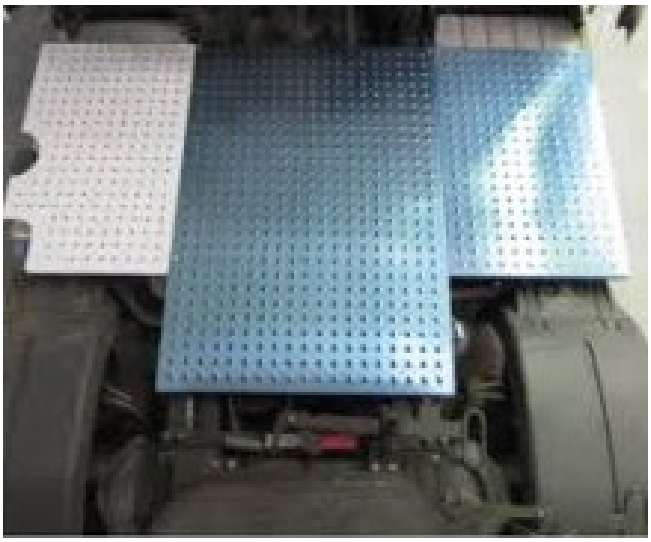
This upgrade provides more protection by reinforcing the outer layer of the fuel tank with an aluminium barrier.

The side panel also gives the tractor unit better aerodynamics which can help to reduce fuel costs

Aluminium side panel

Extended cat-walk

Extended cat-walks are available to place on the area where the HGV driver couples/uncouples the trailer. These give added protection as they reinforce the area above the fuel tank and reduce the risk of damage being caused by drivers walking over the top of the fuel tank.



Extended cat-walk

Carry bag spill kit

Other options include portable containers which can be placed under fuel tanks to collect diesel as it leaks out and sealant putty which can be used to plug holes in the fuel tank and stop the leak.

Again these are cheap, readily available to purchase and can be easily stored in the vehicle.

Carry bag spill kit

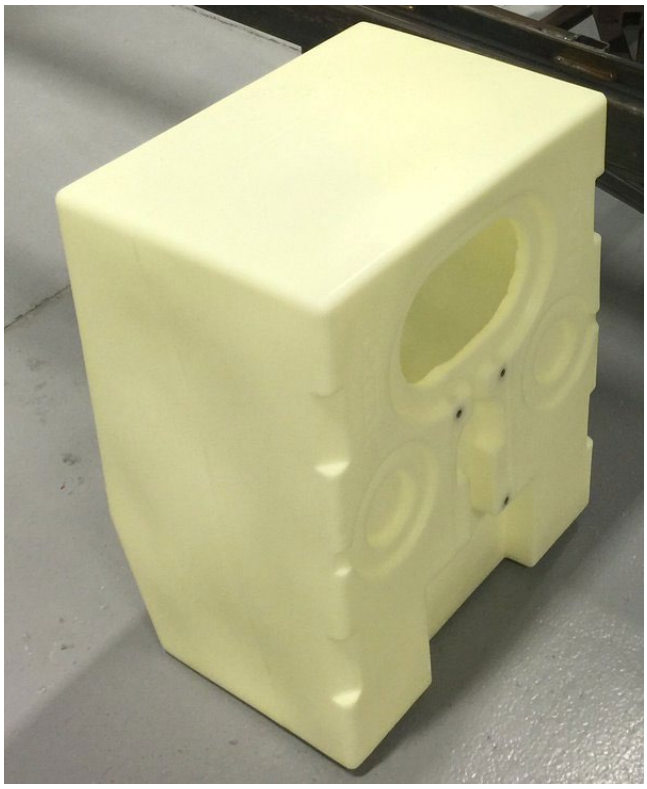
Self-sealing/reinforced tanks

Self-sealing or reinforced tanks are commonly used in aviation. They prevent fuel tanks and flexible fuel storage containers, (widely known as bladders) from leaking fuel and igniting after being damaged.

More recently these types of tanks have been used on military vehicles and in Formula 1.

Self-sealing tanks consist of two solid layers with a gel like material underneath.

When there is a hole in the fuel tank, the gel reacts with the fuel, hardens up and blocks the hole to stop the leak. The material is strong and durable and can help reduce the level of impact in the case of a collision.



Self-sealing/reinforced fuel tank

3.3 What legislation do you need to be aware of?

Laws surrounding fuel tanks

Regulation 39 of The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 stipulates that any fuel must be carried in tanks that are "constructed and maintained so that the leakage of any liquid from the tank is adequately prevented" and "so that the leakage of vapours is adequately prevented".

All vehicles (whether non GB or UK registered) must comply with Community Directive 70/221. Directive 70/221 requires tanks to be corrosion resistant, withstand a pressure of 1.3 bar, and they must not leak (apart from a drip) through the filler cap even if the vehicle overturns. The tanks must not be placed near sharp edges which, in the event of a front or rear impact, could rupture the tank.

Research conducted as part of this guide has revealed that there are no specifications relating to fuel tank clearance above the ground for HGVs. However, our research conducted in 2013[6] suggests that the lower the fuel tank, the greater risk there is of damage from debris or a puncture.

Operators should take this into consideration when procuring new vehicles. Commercial vehicle drivers should also be made aware of clearance levels of the fuel tanks.

Tank construction and specification

The majority of UK operators use standard production sized tanks which usually carry in the range of 200-500 litres, dependent on the maximum permissible mass (MPM) of the particular vehicle.

Due to design limitations the typical location of fuel tanks on HGVs, leaves them exposed in the event of vehicle collisions. On an articulated vehicle the fuel tank is located between two axles on the tractor unit and may not have guard rails. Rigid vehicles tend to have guard rails installed to minimise the likelihood of other road users going under the vehicle in the event of an incident, with the guard rail offering a form of protection for the fuel tank which reduces the impact of damage in the event of a multi-vehicle collision.

There are three different types of fuel tank available:

Type of fuel tanks	Advantage	Disadvantage
Steel	Standard material	Heavier material and may rust over time causing weakness and potential leakage
Aluminium	Lighter material	More expensive material and has a longer life, will not rust
Plastic	Lighter material	Limited in capacity to store large volumes of fuel for the strength of the material

[6] FMG. 2013: Fuel Tanks in LGV's Presentation

Fuel tank checks

There are no specific requirements or specifications for fuel caps or the fuel inlet location. However, MOT inspections in the UK require that a commercial vehicles tank filler cap must not leak under normal usage. Vehicles would fail their test should any sealing washer be damaged or missing, or any visible leakages appear from the tank.

Environmental legislation

If a diesel spillage enters the water system there can be a significant environmental impact to the surrounding area. Anyone deemed to have broken Regulation 38 (1) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations (2010) may be prosecuted by the Environment Agency and face a fine of up to £50,000 and imprisonment of up to twelve months. This can be increased to an unlimited fine and a five year prison sentence if pursued through the Crown Court.

Other environmental legislation that operators need to be aware of is the Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) Act 2009, which was introduced to hold Directors/Managers of negligent companies accountable for damage to the environment. This legislation can also lead to fines of thousands of pounds and a custodial sentence.

4. Case studies

Examples of the type of incidents occurring on the SRN on a regular basis.

The cost and impact of diesel spilliages - **case study 1**

Background

An articulated HGV travelling eastbound along the M62 between junction 21 and 22 pulled on to the hard shoulder due to a loss of power. The driver noticed there was a substantial spillage from the underside of their vehicle.

National Highways traffic officers attended the scene and put a lane 1 closure in place to contain the spillage and help to prevent any secondary incidents taking place.

Impact and cost

Total cost of repair: £2,397.01
Labour cost: £959.58
Aux. Plant Equip./Vehicles: £174.90
Clean-up materials: £84.70
Subcontractors: £1,177.83
Length of delays: 2 hours
Estimated cost to UK PLC: £11,280*
Responders involved:
National Highways traffic officers, maintenance service providers and clean-up crew

Summary

The maintenance service provider was able to use a spillage kit to neutralize, and clear up, the spill in good time with no corrosion damage of the road surface. A combination of the sand and the dry weather conditions helped to stop the spillage soaking into the asphalt.

An investigation by the operator's insurers, revealed that the spillage was caused by a filter that had not be reattached properly following a service to the HGV carried out by a garage.

The £2,397.01 cost of "returning the network to normal" was pursued by National Highways legal team through the insurer of the operator of the HGV and the garage.

The cost of this particular spillage was relatively low in comparison to other examples in this document. This is because the road did not require resurfacing, however, the size of the spillage and the management of the incident caused around two hours of delays for other road users.

**Dft Webtag data*

The cost and impact of diesel spilliages - **case study 2**

Background

An articulated HGV was travelling southbound along the M11 near to junction 12, when the HGV hit the central reservation.

The impact resulted in a puncture to the HGV's fuel tank leaking 400 litres of diesel onto the southbound carriageway.

The emergency services and the maintenance service provider had put in place traffic management, directing traffic using the "up and over" method of diverting the traffic up and back down the slip roads to avoid the accident.

Impact and cost

Total cost of repair: £49,534
Labour cost: £17,183
Aux. Plant Equip./Vehicles: £11,056
Clean-up materials: £6,913
Subcontractors: £14,382 Recovered cost: Ongoing claim
Length of delays: 29 hours 50 minutes
Estimated cost to UK PLC: £1,488,960*
Responders involved: National Highways traffic officers, emergency services, maintanence service providers, specialist clean-up crew and the Environment Agency

Summary

All parties worked well together formulating a plan quickly to stop the M11 coming to a complete standstill. Although there were delays, a diversion was put in place quickly. The HGV was recovered in a timely manner and the diesel spillage could be dealt with.

The extra resource was needed to deal with contaminated soil, which contributed to a large proportion of the cost of the recovery. Contaminated soil in the central reservation area had to be replaced where the truck had pierced its fuel tank, despite a spillage kit being put to good use to treat the diesel on the road surface.

The total road closure lasted nearly 30 hours and due to the closure of a major motorway the incident cost the UK an estimated £1,488,960.

The £49,534 cost of "returning the network to normal" was pursued by National Highways legal team through the insurer of the operator of the HGV.

**Dft Webtag data*

The cost and impact of diesel spilliages - **case study 3**

Background

An articulated HGV was travelling westbound along the A14 near to junction 13. The driver lost control of the vehicle due to a burst tyre and was unable to stop the HGV before colliding with the central reservation.

When the vehicle collided with the central reservation the vehicle overturned, rupturing the fuel tank leading to a complete fuel system failure. The subsequent failure resulted in a diesel spillage stretching 200 metres along the carriageway. The diesel was prevented from entering the water ways by the use of mats and booms.

Impact and cost

Total cost of repair: £21,075
Labour cost: £2,963
Aux. Plant Equip./Vehicles: £1,214
Clean-up materials: £480
Subcontractors: £16,418 Recovered cost: £16,771
Length of delays: 11 hours 59 minutes
Estimated cost to UK PLC: £541,440*
Responders involved: National Highways traffic officers, emergency services, maintenance service providers and specialist clean-up crew

Summary

The emergency services and our traffic officers were quick to react to this incident. They minimised the severity of the delays to other road users by putting in diversions and making both sides of the carriageway safe.

The initial spillage was so severe that the damage to the road surface was irrecoverable and resurfacing was the only option. This then caused long delays and a cost of £541,440 to the UK economy.

Although there were road closures on a large part of the SRN, it was necessary as the risk to other road users was deemed to be high. The return to normality works were carried out with additional resource brought in to hurry the resurfacing and clean-up of the diesel spillage.

The £21,075 cost of “returning the network to normal” was pursued by National Highways legal team through the insurer of the operator of HGV 1.

**Dft Webtag data*

The cost and impact of diesel spilliages - **case study 4**

Background

An articulated HGV was travelling northbound on the M1 near to junction 11. The HGV driver swerved to avoid hitting another vehicle which resulted in the HGV jack-knifing across all lanes of the M1 northbound.

A passenger vehicle travelling behind the HGV could not stop in time resulting in a collision with the HGV's fuel tank causing diesel to spill out across the carriageway. There was also some fuel leakage from the passenger vehicle that was wedged under the HGV.

Impact and cost

Total cost of repair: £123,380
Labour cost: £42,953
Aux. Plant Equip./Vehicles: £2,768
Clean-up materials: £533
Subcontractors: £77,126
Recovered cost: £42,953
Length of delays: 17 hours 46 minutes
Estimated cost to UK PLC: £1,488,960*
Responders involved: National Highways traffic officers, emergency services, maintenance service providers, specialist clean-up crew, and the Environment Agency

Summary

The response plan was well executed by the emergency services, maintenance service provider and our traffic officers. The response plan went well taking into consideration the size of the diesel spillage.

To reduce the impact of the incident, traffic management was set up along with a full diversion around junction 11. This was to aid the speed of the recovery of the vehicle and treatment of the spillage. There were diversions in place for nearly 18 hours with the cost of the incident to the UK economy being an estimated £1,488,960.

There was a need to involve the Environment Agency as the diesel spillage had entered into the water course. The cost of the spill was large, due to the amount of extra resource and specialist equipment needed to clear the diesel spillage and for the road to be resurfaced.

The £123,380 cost of "returning the network to normal" was pursued by National Highways legal team through the insurer of the operator of HGV 1.

**Dft Webtag data*

5. Useful contacts

National Highways

Tel: 0300 123 5000

Website: www.nationalhighways.co.uk

Environment Agency

Tel: 03708 506 506

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

6. Next steps and further information

6.1 Contact National Highways

Report a spillage

If you would like to get in touch with us to report a diesel spillage on a motorway or an A road you can do so by calling 0300 123 5000.

Driver handouts

The driver handouts in this guide are in a printable A4 format. They can be laminated and handed out to drivers as part of their Health and Safety/PPE pack.

6.2 Associated legal considerations

The guidance has been produced to assist commercial vehicle drivers and operators (both UK and overseas) to establish or update their process of preventing and dealing with diesel spillages. However, it is recommended that the following sources of information are also consulted as part of this process:

- Carriage of dangerous goods – carriage regulations
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/cdg/regs.htm
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/nanotechnology/coshh.htm
- Control of the Major Accident Hazard Regulations (COMAH)
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/comah/
- Council Directive 70/221/EEC of 20 March 1970 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to liquid fuel tanks and rear protective devices for motor vehicles and their trailers
  http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:31970L0221
- Employer's Liability Act 1969
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hse40.pdf
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
  http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made Oil and storage regulations for businesses
  https://www.gov.uk/guidance/storing-oil-at-a-home-or-business
- Regulation No 34 of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations (UNECE) — Uniform provisions concerning the approval of vehicles with regard to the prevention of fire risks [2016/1428]
  https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/eea20583-6b50-11e6-9b08-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
- Storing and handling drums and intermediate bulk containers, PPG26
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/storing-and-handling-drums-and-intermediate-bulk-containers-ppg26

- The dangerous substances and explosive atmospheres regulations 2002
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/fireandexplosion/dsear.htm
- The Environmental Damage or Liability Regulations
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/810/contents/made
- The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, regulation 39
  http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1986/1078/contents/made
- The Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010, Regulation 38 (1)
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2010/9780111491423/contents
- Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) Act 2009
  http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/153/contents/made

6.3 Further reading

- Environment Agency - Guidance of selection for use of sorbents BSIF
  https://www.ukspill.org/spill-archive/resources/PPG22-consultation-document.pdf
- Environment Agency – Oil clean-up products and their application in England and Wales https://www.spillcontrolcentre.co.uk/download/Oil_clean_up_products_and_their_application_England_and_Wales.pdf
- Hall fuels – Safety data sheet – Esso diesel
  http://hallfuels.co.uk/media/3481/Esso-Diesel.pdf
- HSE – Carriage of dangerous goods manual
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/cdg/manual/
- HSE – Chemical safety data sheets – COSHH
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/datasheets.htm
- HSE – Emergency response/spill control
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/comah/sragtech/techmeasspill.htm
- UK Spill – Pollution prevention guidelines
  https://www.ukspill.org/spill-archive/resources/PPG22-consultation-document.pdf
- Water UK – Protocol for the disposal of contaminated water
  https://www.ukspill.org/spill-archive/resources/PPG22-consultation-document.pdf

Prevention of diesel spillages guidance summary

What are the root causes of diesel spillages?

Diesel spillages occur due to various factors and often include other secondary impacts. Root causes include:

- filler cap not fully secure or closed properly
- filler cap damaged or missing
- filling the tank right up to the filler cap (necking it)
- lack of anti-spill devices being fitted into the tank
- mechanical failures and fuel system defects
- road traffic collisions
- problems encountered during the transport of fuel
- ruptured tanks
- leakage from corroded or rusty tank

What can you do to help?

1. Check the fuel tank for security
2. Check tank straps and supports – condition and presence/security and strength
3. Check fuel system – leaks/condition/ position of pipes
4. Check filler cap and sealing washer – presence/security/condition
5. Don't overfill the tank - stop at the first click
6. If you notice issues, they should be remedied immediately

303 HGV diesel spillage incidents on our roads in 2025

What are the benefits of preventing and controlling drips, leaks and spillages?

- Improve road safety – Diesel reduces skid resistance. Common places for "slippiness" are horizontal curves, ramps and roundabouts.
- Protect the environment – Diesel is a contaminant and can travel a long way quickly especially if it gets into groundwater and enters the drainage system.
- Reduce congestion – Spillages often lead to lengthy delays especially where resurfacing is required.
- Keep money in your pocket – As a driver, you can be prosecuted and fined up to £1,000 if you are found to be at fault for a spill.
- Avoid the cost of clean-up being passed on – Operators found to be at fault could be liable for fines.

Between 2020 and 2024 motorcyclists made up 36% of the casualties in collisions on England's motorways and major A-road where there was a deposit on the road and oil, diesel or mud was recorded as a hazard.

Spillage response plan (4 stages)

1. **Assess** – Are you and your passengers safe? Has fuel loss stopped? Is there risk of fire? Does it smell? What is the size of the spill? Is it spreading?
2. **Contain** – If you have them, put portable containers under fuel tanks, use putty to plug holes in fuel tank, place booms around the entire spill and prevent diesel seeping into drains. Then use mats to soak up the rest of the spillage.
3. **Communicate** – Call the emergency services and inform your transport office.
4. **Record** – Take photos of the incident and take note of vehicles involved, damage caused, weather, road surface condition, speed at time etc.

In 2014, DVSA conducted trials detecting 2,390 fuel system defects and issued over 1,500 prohibitions to vehicles with defective fuel systems

Diesel exposure for as little as 120 minutes has been shown to result in structural damage to road surfaces

Spillage response plan

Assess

1. Check for safety
- Make sure you are safe
- Attend to others in danger

2. Risk assess
- Has fuel loss stopped?
- Is there a risk of fire?
- Is smell overpowering?
- What is the size of spill?
- Is this spill spreading?

Contain

3a. Use sealant putty
- Use putty to plug holes in fuel tank and stop leak

3b. Use portable containers
- Put containers under fuel tanks to collect diesel as it leaks out

3c. Use booms and mats
- Place booms around entire circumference of spillage and in or around gullies/drainage channels
- Use mats to soak up rest of spillage

Communicate

4. Call the emergency services
- Ring **999** and/or **0300 123 5000**
- Provide as much information as possible
- Give your exact coordinates (think Google Maps/ GPS/telematics)

5. Inform your transport office
- Provide as much information as possible
- Talk through emergency procedure

Record

6. Take photographs of incident or make sketches (where safe to do so) of the incident scene

7. Take note of:
- Vehicles involved
- Damage caused to vehicles/ property
- Weather conditions
- Road surface condition
- Speed at time of incident
- Traffic volume
- Signs/signals given or not given

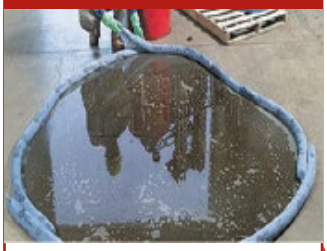
Before you start, ensure you have the correct PPE (e.g. Nitrile/protective gloves, safety boots, protective glasses and, where necessary, dust masks).
Avoid contact with skin.

Using mats and booms

Step 1

Begin placing booms around the spillage

Step 2

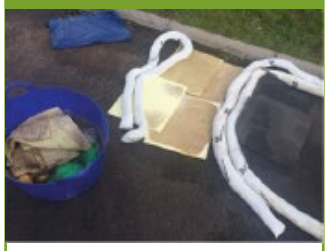


Continue until booms are around entire circumference of spillage and in or around any nearby gullies or drainage channels

Step 3

Use mats to soak up the rest of the spillage

Step 4



Ensure entire spill is covered by mats and leave until spill is fully absorbed

Before you start, ensure you have the correct PPE (e.g. Nitrile/protective gloves, safety boots, protective glasses and, where necessary, dust masks).
Avoid contact with skin.

Using putty

Step 1

Identify source of leak

Step 2

Plug hole with putty

Step 3

Leave putty on hole and empty container

Using portable containers

Step 1

Carry portable container to source of spillage

Step 2

Expand container and place under fuel tank

Diesel spillage treatment types

Universal maintenance – absorbent pads, rolls, pillows, spill socks and booms

Maintenance pads

Maintenance rolls

Maintenance socks

Maintenance booms

Maintenance cushions

Oil absorbents

Oil pads

Oil rolls

Oil socks

Oil booms

Oil pompoms

Spill kits

Truck spill kit

Bunker spill kit

Notes

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