

Satellite Images Highlight Major Oil Spill off Corsica



French and Italian maritime authorities have commenced cleanup of a major oil spill that has spread 20 kilometres in the Mediterranean Sea after two cargo ships collided north of the island of Corsica on Monday, 8 October. European Space Imaging captured a series of satellite images of the site on 9 October at 50cm resolution with [WorldView-2](#). The vessels involved in the accident are the 'Ro-Ro Ulysse', owned and operated by the Tunisian shipping company Cotunav, which ran into the boxship 'CSL Virginia', owned by Cyprus Sea Lines, while it was anchored about 30km off the northern tip of the island. This caused upwards of 600 tonnes of fuel to be leaked.

Whilst no one was injured during the collision, the extent of the damage is considerable. Although it is still too early to determine exactly what happened, satellite imagery analysed from before and after the incident can provide key insights to assist the investigation process.

The benefit of satellite imagery

"Satellite imagery is useful for first responders of any crisis to assess the scope of damage and get another view of the scene. It can also help to monitor and detect any changes that may be critical to minimising or even eliminating further catastrophe," said Adrian Zevenbergen, managing director of [European Space Imaging](#). "The benefit of satellite imagery is that the different spectral bands can be used to classify unidentified materials making it an invaluable source of information for maritime disaster management."

In an effort to contain the disaster, tugboats have been dispatched from three Italian ports, and the French navy has also provided a vessel specialised in containing and cleaning up spills, with oil spill experts dragging a floating barrier to contain the oil followed by the use of a skimmer to suck up the fuel.

"Satellite remote sensing plays a very strategic role in maritime surveillance and supports the entire response process, from providing initial detection and assessment for situational awareness to directing clean-up efforts," said Dr Melanie Rankl. "Very-high-resolution satellite imagery is an additional asset to that of traditionally used radar-based oil spill detection technology. Its ability to provide a detailed overview of the area plays a complementary role in conducting ongoing assessments and monitoring the extent of damage."