

# UN raises alarm on Red Sea oil tanker 'time-bomb'

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The decaying 45-year-old FSO Safer has not been serviced since Yemen was plunged into civil war more than seven years ago.

The UN appealed Tuesday for the last \$14 million needed to try and

prevent a stricken oil tanker from triggering a disaster off Yemen that could cost \$20 billion to clean up.

The decaying 45-year-old FSO Safer, long used as a floating storage platform and now abandoned off the rebel-held Yemeni port of Hodeida, has not been serviced since Yemen was plunged into civil war more than seven years ago.

If it breaks up, it could unleash a potentially catastrophic spill in the Red Sea.

David Gressly, the United Nations' resident and humanitarian coordinator in Yemen, leads UN efforts on the Safer.

"Less than \$14 million is now needed to reach the \$80 million target to start the emergency operation to transfer oil from the Safer to a safe vessel," said Gressly's communications advisor Russell Geekie.

"We're deeply concerned. If the FSO Safer continues to [decay](#), it could break up or explode at any time," he told reporters in Geneva, via video-link from Sanaa.

"The volatile currents and [strong winds](#) from October to December will only increase the risk of disaster. If we don't act, the ship will eventually break apart and a catastrophe will happen. It's not a question of if, but when."

He said the result would potentially be the fifth largest oil spill from a tanker in history, with the clean-up costs alone reaching \$20 billion.

The Safer contains four times the amount of oil that was spilled by the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster, one of the world's worst ecological catastrophes, according to the UN.

"It would unleash an environmental, economic and humanitarian [catastrophe](#)," said Geekie.

The ship contains 1.1 million barrels of oil. The UN has said a spill could destroy ecosystems, shut down the [fishing industry](#) and close the lifeline Hodeida port for six months.

The Safer is unusable, is fit only for scrappage and nothing on it works, said Geekie.

"This is a ticking time bomb," he warned.

"You don't want to go and smoke a cigarette on the deck, I can tell you that much."

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