

# New Zealand Braces for Oil Spill as Rena Breaks Apart

Containership ran aground reef near port of Tauranga on Oct. 5

The containership Rena broke in two in heavy swells over the weekend on the reef off the New Zealand port of Tauranga, where it has been grounded since Oct. 5, putting authorities on high alert for oil and hazardous chemical spills.

Maritime New Zealand said while the bow remains wedged on the Astrolabe Reef, the stern has dislodged, much of it now submerged, and is expected to sink. A tide of plastic and several containers washed up on the beaches of the Bay of Plenty.

Between 200 and 300 containers have been lost overboard. Most have sunk but salvors estimate 50 will remain afloat, washing up on beaches from Whangamata to the eastern Bay of Plenty.

One beached container was just a skeleton, presumably a storage unit for the hundreds of pouches of powder scattered along the length of the beach.

The New Zealand government said some of the containers have hazardous materials in them, but it's expected the water will dilute any toxins. "There are 21 containers that contain creolite from the Bluff aluminum smelter. These were in the section that was breached," said New Zealand Environment Minister Nick Smith.

The Liberian-flag Rena, which has a capacity of 3,361 20-foot equivalent container units, is owned by Costamare Shipping and chartered by Mediterranean Shipping.

Tugs have arrived at the scene been sent out to tag containers with buoys as conditions over the weekend were too rough to tow or safely recover them. Vessels with trawl nets will be also sent out to collect debris once weather conditions improve.

*Source: Journal of Commerce*