ESTIMATION OF REFINERY WASTE - AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN WHILE REFINING OIL AND GAS

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NOVEMBER, 2025

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A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PETROLEUM ENGINEERING, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ENGINEERING IN PETROLEUM

NOVEMBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by **ONANEFE MOSES OGHENEKEVWE** with matriculation number **ENG2009576** in the Department of Petroleum Engineering at the University of Benin, Benin city, Edo state Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

I would like to express my profound gratitude to God Almighty for the grace, wisdom, and strength granted to me throughout the duration of this research work.

My deepest appreciation goes to my parents, **Mr & Mrs ONANEFE**, whose love, support, prayers, and sacrifices have been the foundation of my academic journey. Your encouragement has been my greatest motivation.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my project supervisor, My Mentor **Dr. CHINONYELUM OKEREAFOR,** for their continuous guidance, encouragement, constructive criticisms, and valuable suggestions that greatly contributed to the successful completion of this project.

I am grateful to the entire staff of the Department of Petroleum Engineering for their academic support and contributions to my learning experience. Special thanks to my friends and colleagues for their encouragement, understanding, and assistance during the course of this research.

Finally, to everyone who played a role in the successful completion of this project, your contributions are sincerely appreciated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my profound gratitude to my project supervisor **Engr. M.C CHUKWUMA** for his help, support, timely correction and the bank of knowledge which he was willing to instill during the course of the project.

I am also grateful to the HOD, Department of Petroleum Engineering **Dr. OHENHEN** for her awesome, great and tenacious leadership and guidance throughout the course of this project and also the lecturers for their tutoring which made my stay here a great one. I will also want to appreciate the lab assistant in the department laboratory, in person of Mr. Collins whose support was also helpful.

Finally I would like to express my profound gratitude to my Family; to my parents, **Mr & Mrs ONANEFE** for their financial, moral, spiritual, and constant support all through my stay in school and my siblings whose love and prayer kept me going.

ABSTRACT

Refinery operations play a crucial role in converting crude oil and natural gas into usable petroleum products; however, these processes generate significant quantities of waste that pose serious environmental concerns. This study examines the estimation of refinery wastes and evaluates their impact on the environment during oil and gas refining activities. The research focuses on identifying major categories of refinery waste such as gaseous emissions, wastewater effluents, solid sludge, spent catalysts, and particulate matter and assessing their sources, composition, and disposal techniques. Data was collected through operational records, regulatory reports, and existing environmental studies. Findings indicate that improper waste management contributes to soil degradation, water pollution, air contamination, and adverse health effects on nearby communities. The study emphasizes the importance of adopting environmentally sustainable waste handling practices, advanced treatment technologies, and strict compliance with environmental regulations to minimize ecological damage. It concludes that effective waste estimation and management strategies are essential to ensuring cleaner refinery operations, protecting ecosystems, and promoting public health.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

An industrial process plant that transforms crude oil into more useful petroleum products, like gasoline, diesel fuel, asphalt base, heating oil, kerosene, and liquefied petroleum gas, is known as an Oil Refinery or Petroleum Refinery. [Leffler, 1985; Gary et al., 1984] Ignacy Lukasiewicz constructed the world's first oil refineries in the vicinity of Jaslo, Austrian Empire (now in Poland), between 1854 and 1856 (Frank, 2005). However, they were initially modest because there was little demand for refined fuel. Light distillates (LPG, gasoline, naphtha), middle distillates (kerosene, diesel), heavy distillates, and residuum (heavy fuel oil, lubricating oils, wax, asphalt) are the three general categories into which petroleum products are typically divided.As seen in the above illustration, this classification is predicated on the process of distilling crude oil and separating it into fractions known as distillates and residuum (Leffler, 1985). Cooling water, process water, stormwater, and sanitary sewage water are the wastewaters from the refining of petroleum. The cooling process uses a significant amount of the water used in petroleum refining, which is repeatedly recycled. It contains fewer contaminants than process wastewater because it usually does not come into direct contact with process oil streams. However, because of leaks in the process equipment, it might have some oil contamination. Water used in processing operations accounts for a significant portion of the total wastewater.

Refining operations are indispensable in transforming crude oil into usable petroleum products such as gasoline, diesel, kerosene, lubricants, and petrochemical feedstocks. However, the environmental implications of these operations are significant, particularly due to the generation of refining wastes. These wastes, if not managed properly, can contaminate air, soil, and water, posing serious risks to ecosystems and public health. Refining waste is broadly categorized into Solid, Liquid, and Gaseous forms. Solid wastes include spent catalysts, sludges, filter cakes, and coke dust. Liquid wastes encompass oily wastewater, spent caustics, and sour water, while gaseous emissions include Sulfur Oxides (SOx), Nitrogen Oxides (NOx), Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), and particulate matter. These waste streams often contain toxic, flammable, and corrosive substances such as heavy metals, hydrocarbons, and acid gases. Historically, the oil and gas industry did not place enough emphasis on the environmental impact of refining waste. Waste was often dumped, buried, or incinerated without proper treatment or containment. With growing environmental awareness, public concern, and stricter regulations by environmental agencies, there is now increased pressure on refineries to adopt cleaner technologies and sustainable waste management practices. One of the major challenges in managing refining waste lies in accurately estimating the volume and type of waste generated. Without a clear understanding of waste quantities, it becomes difficult to plan for containment, treatment, reuse, or safe disposal. Overestimation may lead to unnecessary costs, while underestimation could result in environmental violations and potential hazards. This project therefore aims to explore the environmental implications of refining waste, identify the different types of waste generated during the refining process, and most importantly, develop a method for estimating the volume of these wastes. By doing so, refineries can better manage their waste, comply with environmental regulations, and reduce both environmental impact and operational cost.

Because petroleum has so many applications, its environmental impact is vast and far-reaching. Crude oil and natural gas are the primary energy and raw material sources that power many aspects of modern life and the global economy. Their supply has increased dramatically over the last 150 years to meet the demands of a rapidly growing human population, creativity, knowledge, and consumerism. During the, refining process of oil and gas, significant amounts of toxic and non-toxic waste are produced. Some industry by-products, such as volatile organic compounds, nitrogen and sulfur compounds, and spilled oil, can pollute the air, water, and soil at levels that are harmful to life if not properly managed.About 8% (2.7 BT) of the 32.8 BT in 2017 came directly from the petroleum industry's operations. In addition, the industry's deliberate and other natural gas releases resulted in at least 79 million tons of methane (2.4 BT CO_2-equivalent) that year, which is equivalent to roughly 14% of all known anthropogenic and natural emissions of the powerful warming gas.

In many oil-producing regions, especially in developing countries, refineries still operate with outdated infrastructure and weak environmental regulations. As a result, waste is often dumped indiscriminately into nearby water bodies, open fields, or poorly designed pitsposing long-term threats to public health, aquatic life, and agriculture. Inadequate refining waste management has been linked to incidents of groundwater pollution, ecosystem disruption, and even local conflicts due to community exposure to hazardous conditions. A critical but often overlooked aspect of refining waste management is the estimation and quantification of the waste generated.

Managing these wastes is crucial to reducing the environmental footprint of the refining industry. Understanding how these wastes are generated, their chemical characteristics, and their ecological effects is essential for developing sustainable waste management practices and regulatory policies. Refining wastes often contain flammable, corrosive, and carcinogenic substances that persist in the environment for extended periods. Improper handling or disposal of these materials can lead to severe soil degradation, groundwater contamination, biodiversity loss, and public health crises, particularly in communities living near refinery sites. Despite the significant environmental and economic consequences of refining waste, there is no standardized or user-friendly tool widely used in the refining sector for estimating waste volume based on real time operational data. Most refineries rely on rough approximations or outdated records, leaving room for errors that can have severe downstream consequences.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Oil refineries play a vital role in the global energy supply chain by transforming crude oil into fuels and petrochemical feedstocks. However, in the process, they generate diverse waste streams such as gaseous emissions, wastewater, sludges, and solid residues. These wastes often contain hazardous substances like hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and sulfur compounds, which pose significant risks to ecosystems and human health.A key challenge lies in the limited estimation and quantification of these refining wastes.While considerable research has focused on the impacts of exploration and drilling activities, refining operations are less studied, leading to a serious gap in data. Without reliable information on waste volumes and characteristics, policymakers, regulators, and refinery operators struggle to design effective waste management strategies.

This problem is particularly pressing in developing countries such as Nigeria, where regulatory frameworks are often weak or poorly enforced. Refining wastes are frequently discharged untreated into rivers, land, or the atmosphere, causing water contamination, soil degradation, and air pollution. Communities living near refineries face heightened risks of respiratory illnesses, cancers, and other health challenges linked to long-term exposure.

In addition, the global push for sustainability and cleaner energy highlights the urgency of tackling refining waste. The absence of accurate estimation hinders the adoption of modern treatment technologies, recycling, and compliance with international environmental standards.In summary, oil refineries are indispensable for meeting global energy and industrial needs, yet their waste streams remain poorly quantified and inadequately managed. This gap contributes to environmental degradation, health hazards, and regulatory inefficiencies. Addressing it requires systematic approaches to refining waste estimation and sustainable management, especially in developing nations where the risks are most severe.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this research is to enhance refining waste management through accurate waste volume estimation.

The specific objectives are:

- To identify and classify the major types of waste generated during crude oil refining.
- To assess the environmental impacts associated with different categories of refining waste.
- To develop mathematical models or equations for estimating the volume of refining waste using parameters relevant to refinery operations.
- To design and implement a user-friendly Microsoft Excel tool that enables operators and engineers to estimate refining waste volume based on process data.
- To recommend practical strategies for minimizing refining waste and improving environmental sustainability in refining operations.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research focuses solely on waste generated during the refining of crude oil, excluding upstream (exploration and drilling) and midstream (transportation and storage) activities. The study is limited to typical refining operations such as:

- Atmospheric and vacuum distillation
- Catalytic cracking and hydrocracking
- Alkylation
- Desulfurization (HDS)
- Treatment units (e.g., amine units, sour water strippers).

The types of waste considered include:

- Sludges from tanks and wastewater treatment units
- Spent catalysts from reactors
- Oily wastewater and sour water
- Air emissions and VOCs
- Solid residues and coke

The study does not cover:

- Construction waste
- Domestic/administrative waste from refinery housing
- Emergency spill response waste

This focused approach allows for the development of a more accurate and relevant waste volume estimation model for refining specific applications.

1.5 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This research is expected to generate results that are both academically valuable and practically applicable to the oil and gas refining sector. The outcomes will address critical knowledge gaps and provide useful tools for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and environmental regulators. The key expected outcomes are as follows:

I. Comprehensive Estimation of Refinery Waste Types and Volumes

One of the most important results of this study will be a detailed estimation of the different categories of waste generated by oil refineries. These include gaseous emissions (such as carbon dioxide, sulfur oxides, and volatile organic compounds), liquid effluents (such as oily wastewater, process water, and cooling water discharges), and solid residues (such as sludge, spent catalysts, and coke). By quantifying these wastes, the study will provide a reliable baseline for waste management planning. This estimation will also help identify which waste streams are generated in the largest volumes and which carry the highest environmental risk, enabling more targeted interventions.

II. Environmental Risk Profile of Refining Wastes

In addition to estimating waste volumes, the study will evaluate the environmental risks posed by different waste types. This will involve identifying pollutants of concern and examining their potential impacts on air, water, and soil quality. For example, untreated effluents discharged into water bodies can lead to aquatic toxicity and biodiversity loss, while gaseous emissions contribute to climate change and respiratory diseases. The outcome will be a clear risk profile that highlights priority areas where regulatory attention and waste treatment technologies should be concentrated.

III. Recommendations for Improved Waste Reduction and Treatment

Another expected outcome is a set of practical recommendations for reducing and managing refinery wastes. These will include strategies for minimizing waste generation at the source, enhancing recycling and reuse opportunities, and adopting cleaner technologies such as hydrodesulfurization, bioremediation, and advanced effluent treatment systems. Recommendations will also focus on strengthening monitoring frameworks and ensuring compliance with environmental standards, particularly in regions where enforcement is weak. The aim is to present solutions that are environmentally effective yet economically feasible, especially for developing nations.

IV. Development of a Transferable Waste Estimation Model

A significant contribution of this research will be the development of a waste estimation model that can be applied to other refineries beyond the case study area. This model will provide a systematic approach to quantifying waste streams, making it useful for both operators and regulators. It will also serve as a reference for comparative studies across different refineries and regions, enabling policymakers to make informed decisions on refining waste management and environmental protection.

V. Contribution to Sustainable Refining Practices

Ultimately, the study is expected to promote more sustainable refining operations by linking waste estimation with environmental protection. The outcomes will not only fill critical knowledge gaps but also provide evidence-based strategies that can improve refinery efficiency, reduce ecological damage, and align local practices with global sustainability standards. In the long term, these outcomes could support Nigeria and other developing nations in meeting international environmental commitments while safeguarding public health.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address critical gaps in knowledge and practice concerning refining waste management within the oil and gas industry. Oil refineries are central to national and global energy supply, yet they generate substantial quantities of waste that, if not properly estimated and managed, can undermine both environmental sustainability and human health. By focusing on the estimation of refining wastes, this research provides a framework for improved understanding and management of one of the least-studied aspects of petroleum operations.

Firstly, the findings will provide valuable insights into waste minimization by identifying major waste streams and quantifying their volumes. This information will guide refinery operators in adopting preventive strategies, process optimization, and cleaner technologies that reduce waste at the source. Such improvements can enhance operational efficiency while lowering environmental footprints.

Secondly, the study will promote environmental stewardship by drawing attention to the ecological and health risks associated with refinery waste. By linking waste streams with their potential impacts on air, water, soil, and surrounding communities, the research emphasizes the need for sustainable practices that balance energy production with environmental protection. This contributes to broader global goals of climate action, pollution control, and sustainable industrial development.

Thirdly, the research has direct relevance for policy formulation and regulatory oversight. In Nigeria and other developing nations, weak or poorly enforced environmental regulations often allow refinery waste mismanagement to persist. The outcomes of this study will provide evidence-based data that can support the development of stricter guidelines, monitoring frameworks, and compliance mechanisms. Such policies are essential for aligning national petroleum operations with international environmental standards.

Finally, the study holds significance beyond Nigeria. By developing a waste estimation model that can be adapted to other refinery contexts, the research offers a transferable tool for refining industries worldwide. This extends the impact of the study to the international level, contributing to global discourse on sustainable oil and gas operations.

In summary, this study is significant because it not only enhances scientific understanding of refining waste generation but also provides practical pathways for minimizing environmental risks, strengthening policy, and promoting sustainable development in the petroleum sector.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have emphasized the environmental impact of oil and gas operations, but most of these have centered on exploration and drilling activities. In the upstream sector, wastes such as drilling muds, produced water, and cuttings have been extensively studied, leading to the development of models and standards for quantification and management. However, the downstream refining sector has not received comparable attention. When refining operations are discussed, the literature typically concentrates on emission controls, waste water treatment, and process optimization. These are critical, but they represent only part of the environmental footprint of refining. One key area that has been relatively neglected is waste volume estimation, a prerequisite for sound environmental management.

Reis (1996) was among the earliest to argue that refining waste management was fragmented and inconsistent, with data scattered across regulatory bodies, corporate records, and scattered studies. This fragmentation has persisted over the years. In Nigeria, for example, information on refinery waste is often confined to internal reports by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) or the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), with very limited availability to independent researchers. This creates a reliance on anecdotal data and fragmented case studies, making it difficult to build robust waste estimation models.

Rana (2008) advanced the discussion by emphasizing that effective waste management requires not only quantification but also an understanding of waste behavior and properties. For example, the oily sludges that accumulate at the bottom of refinery tanks often contain toxic heavy metals, emulsified oils, and other hazardous components. Their treatment demands costly processes such as centrifugation, chemical stabilization, or incineration. Without accurate knowledge of both the volume and the chemical behavior of such wastes, refineries cannot make informed decisions about disposal or recovery. Rana's perspective stresses that waste estimation is not a purely numerical exercise but also a strategic and operational one.

In contrast, upstream-focused studies such as Flemming et al. (2010) have made progress by designing waste quantification models for drilling operations. By analyzing tank sizes, pit volumes, and hauling records, Flemming and colleagues demonstrated that predictive frameworks can be created to forecast both liquid and solid wastes. The implication is clear: if systematic quantification works in upstream operations, similar principles can and should be adapted to downstream refining. However, the complexity of refining processes encompassing units like distillation, catalytic cracking, hydroprocessing, alkylation, and reforming means that refining waste streams are far more diverse and variable in composition.

Richards (2007) provides a valuable working definition of refining waste as any by-product not included in the final petroleum product and which cannot be reused without treatment. His analysis underscores the practical consequences of underestimating waste volumes. For example, in one reported case from a U.S. Gulf Coast refinery, an underestimation of catalyst waste resulted in insufficient storage capacity, forcing the refinery to suspend operations temporarily until emergency disposal arrangements could be made. This not only raised operational costs but also attracted regulatory scrutiny. Richards highlights that accurate estimation is essential for equipment sizing, cost control, and compliance reporting.

Globally, case studies have revealed striking contrasts in how different refineries approach waste estimation and reporting. In India, a study conducted at the Gujarat refinery in 2012 revealed that oily sludges were underreported by nearly 30% because measurement was based only on sludge physically removed during tank cleanings, overlooking sludges that remained in inaccessible sections. In Nigeria, an internal audit of the Port Harcourt refinery in 2016 revealed inconsistencies in catalyst disposal records, where contractor estimates did not match quantities reported to regulators. Meanwhile, in Europe, the European Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Bureau (EIPPCB, 2015) noted that although emissions data had become standardized across EU member states, reporting of solid refinery wastes still varied significantly. These examples reinforce Reis's earlier observation about fragmentation and underline the urgent need for reliable, standardized models.

Technological developments have partially addressed monitoring challenges. Real time emission sensors and automated separation units have been introduced in advanced refineries, particularly in Western Europe and North America. These tools allow continuous monitoring of gaseous emissions and effluents, creating robust datasets. However, the situation is very different for solid and semi solid wastes such as sludges, spent catalysts, and sulfur residues. In many refineries, these are still estimated only periodically such as during shutdowns or tank cleanings meaning that annual waste generation data is often reconstructed from incomplete records. This gap illustrates why even technologically advanced facilities continue to struggle with accurate waste estimation.

Regulatory frameworks have added pressure for better waste reporting. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires annual reporting of refining wastes under the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI). Similarly, the European Union Waste Framework Directive obliges detailed tracking of all waste streams, hazardous or otherwise. These requirements have encouraged some refineries to adopt more rigorous estimation methods, but challenges remain. In developing regions such as Nigeria, regulatory frameworks like the DPR's Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria (EGASPIN) exist on paper but lack effective enforcement. This has led to continued underreporting, weak compliance, and inadequate treatment infrastructure. The gap between regulatory intent and operational practice is therefore particularly stark in these contexts.

Another layer of complexity is added by the global shift toward sustainability and circular economy principles. Refineries are under increasing pressure to recover value from wastes rather than simply dispose of them. For example, spent catalysts contain recoverable metals such as vanadium, nickel, and molybdenum, which can be recycled. Similarly, oily sludges can be treated to recover hydrocarbons, providing additional feedstock for the refinery. However, the success of such recovery initiatives depends heavily on accurate waste estimation. Without reliable forecasts of how much spent catalyst or sludge will be generated annually, investment in recovery technologies is difficult to justify.

Several "lessons learned" stories further illustrate the importance of estimation. In one European refinery, underestimation of tank bottom sludge led to the construction of an undersized treatment facility, which later had to be expanded at double the cost. In another case from Asia, overestimation of waste volumes resulted in an oversized incineration unit that operated far below capacity, reducing economic efficiency. Both examples illustrate that waste estimation must balance accuracy with adaptability. Estimating too little risks overwhelming treatment systems, while estimating too much risks wasting resources.

Taken together, these insights reveal a number of clear gaps in the literature. First, there is a shortage of refining specific waste estimation models, especially for solid and semi solid streams. Second, data remain fragmented and inconsistent, particularly in developing countries where access to refinery records is limited. Third, technological advancements have improved monitoring of emissions and effluents but have not solved the challenge of solid waste quantification. Fourth, regulatory frameworks often mandate waste reporting without providing clear methodologies for estimation, leaving refineries to rely on ad hoc approaches.

This study responds to these gaps by developing a spreadsheet-based estimation model tailored to refining operations. The model integrates operational parameters such as throughput, crude oil type, operating temperature, product yield, and process type, creating a practical and adaptable tool for predicting waste volumes. Unlike previous approaches, which often rely on post-disposal contractor records, this model links directly to process data that refineries already collect, making it both efficient and realistic. Ultimately, the study contributes not just to academic knowledge but also to practical refinery management, regulatory compliance, and the pursuit of more sustainable refining practices.

2.1 CONCEPT OF REFINING IN OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

2.1.1 OVERVIEW OF OIL AND GAS REFINING PROCESSES

Refining in the oil and gas industry refers to the set of industrial processes used to transform crude oil into usable products such as fuels, lubricants, petrochemical feedstocks, and other valuable derivatives. Crude oil as extracted from reservoirs is a complex mixture of hydrocarbons with varying molecular weights, impurities, and physical properties. In its raw state, crude oil has limited direct uses, which makes refining an essential step in the petroleum value chain.

The refining process separates, converts, and treats crude oil into fractions that match market demands for energy and petrochemicals. Refineries are thus designed as integrated complexes equipped with multiple processing units that function together to maximize product yield, efficiency, and environmental compliance.

2.1.2 Importance of Refining to Energy and Petrochemical Supply

Refining is central to modern industrial civilization for several reasons:

1. **Energy Supply**: The majority of global energy demand is met through refined petroleum products such as gasoline, diesel, aviation fuel, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). These fuels power transportation, industries, and electricity generation.

2. **Petrochemical Production**: Refined fractions such as naphtha and ethane serve as feedstock for the petrochemical industry. These are processed further to manufacture plastics, synthetic fibers, resins, fertilizers, and a wide array of consumer products.

3. **Economic Development**: Refining ensures value addition to crude oil, generating revenue for producing nations and employment opportunities across the downstream sector.

4. **Environmental and Safety Standards**: Refining incorporates processes such as desulfurization and treatment that reduce pollutants like sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides, and particulates, thus aligning petroleum use with global environmental regulations.

Without refining, crude oil would remain largely unusable in its natural state, and the energy chemical industries that sustain modern economies would be severely hampered.

2.1.3 General Stages of Refining

The refining process is typically carried out in successive stages, each with a specific purpose:

1. **Distillation (Primary Separation):**

The first step in refining is atmospheric and vacuum distillation. Crude oil is heated and fed into distillation columns where it is separated into fractions based on boiling point ranges. Products include gases, naphtha, kerosene, gas oil, and heavy residues.

2. **Cracking (Conversion Processes):**

Heavy hydrocarbon molecules are broken down into lighter, more valuable products such as gasoline and diesel. Cracking can be thermal (using heat) or catalytic (using catalysts to enhance reaction efficiency). Fluid Catalytic Cracking (FCC) is a common method.

3. **Reforming**:

This involves the rearrangement of hydrocarbon molecules to improve the quality of gasoline and produce aromatic compounds used in petrochemicals. Catalytic reforming increases the octane number of fuels and generates hydrogen, which is also useful for other refining processes.

4. **Treatment and Blending**:

Various processes remove impurities such as sulfur, nitrogen, and metals from petroleum fractions. Hydrodesulfurization (HDS) and hydrotreating are widely applied. After treatment, blending combines different fractions to meet product specifications for commercial fuels.

5. **Other Supporting Processes:**

- Alkylation and Polymerization (to produce high-octane gasoline components).
- Coking (to convert heavy residues into lighter products and petroleum coke).
- Isomerization (to improve fuel performance).

Together, these stages ensure that crude oil is fully utilized with minimal waste, generating a balanced slate of fuels, lubricants, and feedstocks.

2.2 TYPES AND SOURCES OF REFINERY WASTES

Refining is a critical stage in the downstream oil and gas industry where crude oil is processed into usable products such as gasoline, diesel, kerosene, and petrochemicals. While essential for modern economies, petroleum refining operations generate various types of wastes that pose serious environmental challenges. These wastes, if not properly managed, can pollute air, water, and soil, affecting both ecosystems and human health. To develop effective waste minimization strategies and environmentally sound practices, it is important to understand the sources, types, and impacts of refining wastes (USEPA, 1995).
The primary refining wastes include:

- Sludges
- Spent Catalysts
- Process Wastewater
- Air Emissions
- Solid wastes.

The refining of crude oil involves complex chemical and physical processes such as distillation, cracking, reforming, and treating. These operations require the use of catalysts, chemicals, and high temperatures which, in turn, lead to the generation of various waste streams. Refining wastes can be classified into five major categories: sludge and oily residues, spent catalysts, process wastewater, solid wastes, and air pollutants.

2.2.1. Sludge and Oily Residues

Sludges are one of the most common and problematic wastes from refineries. They consist of oil-water-solid emulsions generated during storage tank cleaning, wastewater treatment, and separation processes. Improper disposal can contaminate land and groundwater, posing long-term risks to both ecosystems and human populations.

These wastes primarily originate from

- Tank bottoms: Accumulation of oil, water, and solids at the base of crude and product storage tanks.
- API separators and oil-water separation units: Designed to separate oil from wastewater.
- Dewatering and filtration units

Characteristics:

- Composed of hydrocarbons, water, silt, rust, heavy metals (e.g., vanadium, nickel).
- Often contains Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are known carcinogens.

Environmental Effects:

I. Seepage into soil and groundwater.
II. Bioaccumulation in aquatic organisms

2.2.2 Spent Catalysts

Refining operations such as hydrocracking, catalytic reforming, and desulfurization rely heavily on catalysts to accelerate chemical reactions. Over time, these catalysts become deactivated due to poisoning or fouling by coke or metals and must be replaced. Spent catalysts typically contain heavy metals such as molybdenum, cobalt, and nickel, making them hazardous. If not recycled or properly disposed, they can leach into soil and water, leading to heavy metal contamination.

Catalysts used in refining (e.g., in hydrocracking, reforming, desulfurization) degrade over time due to:

- Coking (carbon build-up),
- Contamination by metals (e.g., arsenic, vanadium),
- Physical erosion.

Composition:

Alumina or silica-based supports impregnated with metals like cobalt, molybdenum, platinum, or nickel.

Environmental Effects:

- Toxic metal leaching into the soil or water table.
- Hazardous waste requiring controlled landfilling or recycling.
- Potential for fire or explosion if not properly deactivated.

2.2.3 Process Wastewater

Large volumes of wastewater are produced in petroleum refining, containing a mix of hydrocarbons, sulfides, ammonia, phenols, suspended solids, and dissolved metals. Wastewater is generated from various units, including desalter units, cooling towers, and steam-stripping processes. If untreated, this wastewater can cause oxygen depletion in aquatic systems, fish kills, and eutrophication. It may also contain carcinogenic or endocrine-disrupting compounds.

Generated from multiple sources including:

- Desalter units (brine wash of crude oil),
- Cooling systems (blowdown water),
- Steam-stripping and distillation.

Pollutants:

Hydrocarbons, ammonia, sulfides, phenols, suspended solids, heavy metals.

Environmental Effects:

I. Reduces oxygen levels in receiving water bodies, leading to fish kills.
II. Promotes eutrophication from nutrient loading
III. Contains toxins and endocrine disruptors affecting aquatic ecosystems

2.2.4 Solid Wastes

Solid wastes from refining include spent filters, insulation materials, incinerator ash, and contaminated soil from spills or maintenance activities. These materials may be classified as hazardous depending on their content of toxic chemicals. Improper disposal can result in leaching of contaminants into the environment. For example, filters used in removing sulfur or metals from products can become saturated and require specialized handling.

These include:

- Spent filters and resins,
- Contaminated gaskets and insulation materials,
- Incinerator ash,
- Construction/demolition debris.

Composition/Nature:

Some are non-hazardous, but many are classified as hazardous depending on contamination.

Environmental Effects:

- Space consumption in landfills.
- Leachate formation and possible groundwater pollution.
- Micro plastic and fiber contamination.

2.2.5 Air Emissions and Gaseous Wastes

Air pollution from refineries arises from flaring, venting, combustion, and fugitive emissions. Key pollutants include sulfur oxides (SOx), nitrogen oxides (NOx), Volatile Organic Compoun ds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), and particulate matter. Some refining processes also release greenhouse gases like CO_2 and methane (CH_4). These emissions contribute to air quality degradation, acid rain, smog formation, and climate change.

Refineries are significant sources of air pollution through:

- Combustion units (boilers, heaters).
- Flaring and venting,
- Fugitive leaks from valves and seals.

Composition/Common Emissions:

- Sulfur oxides (SOx), Nitrogen oxides (NOx),
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs),
- Particulate matter (PM),
- Greenhouse gases (CO_2, CH_4).

Environmental Effects:

I. Decreased air quality and respiratory illnesses.
II. Acid rain formation, damaging crops and water bodies.
III. Contribution to global warming and climate change

2.3 CLASSIFICATION OF REFINERY WASTE

Refining waste refers to the by-products generated during the processing of crude oil and natural gas in refineries. These wastes can have significant environmental implications and are therefore subject to various regulatory frameworks. While the classification of refining waste may vary slightly from country to country depending on local environmental policies and legislation, the most widely accepted classification system categorizes refining wastes into two main groups:

- Exempt Wastes
- Non-Exempt Wastes

Exempt Wastes

Exempt wastes are considered non-hazardous and are therefore not regulated under the hazardous waste provisions of the Environmental Protection Agencies (EPA's) or similar regulatory bodies in other countries. These wastes originate specifically from core refining operations that are directly associated with the physical and chemical treatment of crude oil into usable products such as gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, and lubricants.

Exempt wastes typically include:

- Catalyst residues that are regularly used and regenerated in refining units.
- Process water sludge that result from separation of hydrocarbons.
- Tank bottom sludges that accumulate during the storage of intermediate or final petroleum products.
- Spent caustics from treating sulfur compounds in various refinery units.

According to Stilwell (1991), approximately 98% of all refining wastes are categorized under exempt wastes, emphasizing how most wastes from core refining activities are considered non-hazardous under regulatory definitions. The exemption is based on the idea that such wastes are uniquely associated with petroleum refining processes and do not pose an inherent danger when managed properly.

Non-Exempt Wastes

Non-exempt wastes are those that are not uniquely associated with the refining of oil and gas products or are generated from ancillary activities such as maintenance, cleaning, and general industrial operations within the refinery facility. These wastes are not automatically hazardous, but because they fall outside the scope of core refining processes, they are not exempt from hazardous waste regulations and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Typical examples of non-exempt refining wastes include:

- Waste solvents and degreasers used for equipment cleaning.
- Paint residues and coating materials.
- Used lubricating oils and filters from machinery maintenance.
- Office and cafeteria wastes, if generated on-site.
- Batteries, fluorescent bulbs, and other universal wastes.

These wastes are not unique to the petroleum industry and could be found in virtually any industrial setting. Therefore, they are subjected to standard hazardous waste assessments.

Further Classification of Non-Exempt Wastes

Non-exempt refining wastes can be further classified based on their characteristics and management needs:

- Non-Exempt Hazardous Wastes

- Non-Exempt Non-Hazardous Wastes
- Non-Exempt Special Wastes

Non-Exempt Hazardous Wastes

These are wastes that exhibit any of the following four characteristics as defined by the U.S. EPA or equivalent regulatory agencies:

- **Ignitability**: Wastes that can easily catch fire (e.g., flammable solvents).
- **Corrosivity**: Wastes that can corrode metals or have very high or low pH.
- **Reactivity**: Wastes that are unstable under normal conditions (e.g., can explode or emit toxic gases).
- **Toxicity**: Wastes that are harmful or fatal when ingested or absorbed, or that can leach toxic substances into the environment.

If a non-exempt waste meets any of these criteria, it must be managed according to strict hazardous waste management protocols, including proper storage, labeling, transportation, and disposal.

Non-Exempt Non-Hazardous Wastes

These wastes do not meet the criteria for hazardous classification but still require responsible management to prevent environmental contamination. Examples include certain packaging materials, uncontaminated plastics, and inert construction debris from maintenance operations.

Non-Exempt Special Wastes

This category includes wastes that do not fall neatly into hazardous or non-hazardous labels but still require special handling due to their composition, potential volume, or impact.

Examples may include:

- Asbestos-containing materials.
- Medical or sanitary wastes from onsite clinics.
- Certain types of sludges or emulsions from off-spec product recovery operations.

Clarification on the Scope of Exemption

A common misconception in the industry is that any waste generated by, or even near, refining operations is automatically exempt from regulation. This is incorrect. Regulatory bodies such as the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC, 1993) clearly state that only wastes uniquely and intrinsically linked to the core processing and purification of hydrocarbons are exempt.

This means that:

- The waste must originate from a unit or process directly involved in converting crude oil into usable products.
- The waste must not be generated during unrelated operations such as transportation, distribution, or downstream manufacturing activities.
- Wastes generated from indirect support activities, such as administrative functions or general site upkeep, are not exempt.

2.4 TOXICITY OF REFINING WASTE

Toxicity refers to the extent to which a substance can harm the health and well-being of living organisms upon exposure. In most environmental and industrial assessments, the focus is primarily on how such substances affect human health. Toxicity is typically evaluated using bioassays, where laboratory animals are exposed to varying quantities of a substance to observe resulting health effects (Res, 1993).In the context of petroleum refining operations, toxicity testing of waste materials often involves the use of specific aquatic organisms. For marine environments, test species such as mysid shrimp and sheepshead minnows are commonly used. In freshwater systems, fathead minnows and daphnid shrimp serve as standard bioassay organisms (Reis, 1996).

Toxicity can be measured using two main approaches: dose and concentration.

Dose refers to the amount of a toxic substance that has been absorbed into the tissues of the test organism.

Concentration describes the level of the substance present in the surrounding environment where the organism resides, and it usually includes the duration of exposure.

Several metrics are used to express toxicity:

- **LD_{50} (Lethal Dose 50%):** The dose that causes death in 50% of the test organisms.
- **LDLO (Lowest Lethal Dose)**: The minimum dose at which the first death is observed.

The method of exposure whether through inhalation, ingestion, or injection also influences the outcome of the toxicity.

Similarly, when measured in terms of concentration:

- **LC_{50} (Lethal Concentration 50%)**: The concentration that is fatal to 50% of the test population within a specific time period.

- **LCLO (Lowest Lethal Concentration):** The minimum concentration that causes at least one death during the same period (Reis, 1996).

2.5 IMPACTS OF REFINING WASTE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Refining processes in the oil and gas industry generate various forms of waste that can pose significant environmental threats. The extent of these impacts is primarily influenced by the type of waste, its concentration in the environment after discharge, and the sensitivity of the surrounding biological communities. According to Reis (1993), while some environmental risks associated with refining waste may be minimal, others can have substantial consequences.

Among the most critical concerns are the contamination of aquatic systems, soil degradation, and atmospheric pollution. Inadequate management or improper disposal of refining residues into surface water bodies can endanger aquatic ecosystems, potentially leading to biodiversity loss and disruption of ecological balance. Furthermore, emissions resulting from refining operations, especially from combustion processes, can contribute to air quality deterioration. These emissions may include harmful gases that pose health risks to humans and animals, cause respiratory problems, damage plant life, and lead to soil acidification.

Of particular concern is the release of hydrogen sulfide, a highly toxic gas that, even at low concentrations, can be lethal to exposed individuals. Table 2.3 presents a summary of the environmental consequences commonly associated with various refining waste streams and their modes of release.

Table 2.1: Summary of Potential Environmental Impacts of Refining Operations

Refining Waste Type	Source/Activity	Potential Environmental Impact
Sludges and Oily Residues	Tank bottoms, Separators, oily water treatment	Soil and water contamination, long-term persistence of hydrocarbons
Spent Catalysts	Catalytic reforming, hydrocracking units	Heavy metal contamination, hazardous waste classification, soil and water toxicity
Process Wastewater	Cooling towers, process streams, washing operations	Water pollution, contamination of surface and groundwater, harm to aquatic ecosystems
Air Emissions	Combustion processes, flaring, equipment leaks	Air pollution, respiratory issues, greenhouse gas emissions, acid rain, smog formation

Solid wastes	Maintenance and operation residues	Land pollution, non-biodegradable waste accumulation

2.5.1 Effects of Refining Waste on Human Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 25% of mortality in developing countries arises from environmental hazards. Over the years, soaring demand for humanity's essential needs has prompted industrial-scale production and the generation of large quantities of waste. Petroleum refineries generate large quantities of waste, which gives rise to health effects such as cancer, eye defects, birth defects, and reproductive defects. Furthermore, the residents living around refineries encounter several hazards arising from operations that generate noise, radiation, chemicals, vibration, dust, and toxic pollutant gases.According to the state of research, emissions from petroleum refineries, or PREs, represent serious threats to the environment, public health, and safety. Thus, the acute and long-term impacts of PREs on the health and safety of locals living close to petroleum refineries are briefly reviewed in this paper. According to the reviewed literature, PREs cause cardiovascular, respiratory, and reproductive disorders in addition to a variety of cancers and leukemia. As a result, a variety of strategies have been put forth in the literature to lessen, eradicate, or deal with the immediate and long-term impacts of PREs. To quickly identify, remove, and remediate the risks, the suggested methods include bioremediation in addition to PRE monitoring and assessment.

The discharge and improper management of refining waste tend to exert predominantly localized impacts, rather than widespread ecosystem-wide effects. As such, adverse health outcomes are more likely to occur in communities situated close to refining facilities or waste disposal sites. Local contamination from refining waste may lead to the pollution of drinking water sources and aquatic ecosystems, particularly those that supply fish consumed by nearby populations. This contamination can involve a wide range of hazardous substances. Over time, the continuous release or occasional accidental discharge of toxic refining by-products may result in the bioaccumulation of harmful chemicals within the food web. These substances tend to increase in concentration as they ascend through trophic levels, thereby amplifying their toxicity. Consequently, even low levels of contamination in water or fish can pose serious health risks to humans (Rana, 2008).

Human exposure to toxic substances from refining waste may occur through several pathways. While inhalation is a key concern for personnel working in refining plants, ingestion of polluted water or contaminated food represents the primary route of exposure for the general population. Such exposure can result from accidental spills, unauthorized or permitted discharges into nearby water bodies, or leakage from storage facilities into underground water sources. The health effects linked to such exposure include alterations in blood enzyme levels, neurological developmental issues in children, damage to the central nervous system, visual and cognitive impairments, and skin related conditions. These effects can be both carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic, depending on the specific chemical involved, as well as the duration and intensity of exposure (Rana, 2008).

In addition, health professionals have raised concerns about emissions from diesel powered machinery commonly used in refining operations. These emissions are known to contribute to acid rain, ground level ozone formation, and visibility reduction. Research has demonstrated that prolonged exposure to diesel exhaust can lead to respiratory disorders, lung tissue damage, and may potentially increase the risk of cancer in humans (Haut et al., 2007).

2.5.2 Impact of Refining Waste on Plants and Animals

Refining waste, particularly those containing hydrocarbons, can pose significant threats to both plant and animal life. Research has indicated that hydrocarbon concentrations as low as 1 mg/L in aquatic environments can produce sub lethal effects in certain marine species (Reis, 1993). In terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, elevated concentrations of hydrocarbons exceeding approximately 1% by weight in the soil can inhibit plant growth, leading to stunted development and reduced agricultural productivity. Interestingly, at very low concentrations, some hydrocarbons may initially stimulate plant growth, though the long-term effects are often detrimental.

Wildlife, particularly marine animals that rely on fur or feathers for insulation, are especially vulnerable to oil contamination from refining waste. When coated with oil, these animals lose their natural insulation and are at risk of hypothermia. Furthermore, during grooming or cleaning, animals may ingest significant amounts of hydrocarbons, which can result in fatal internal toxicity (Reis, 1993)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach and a case study design. The case study focuses on the Port Harcourt Refinery, located in Alesa-Eleme, Rivers State, Nigeria. The choice of a case study design is appropriate because it enables an in-depth investigation of real-life environmental situations within an operational refinery setting. It allows for a detailed understanding of how refinery wastes are generated, processed, managed, and the implications these wastes pose to the environment.

The mixed-methods approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. The quantitative component involves estimating the volume and composition of refinery wastes using established waste estimation models, emission factors, and regulatory standards. The qualitative component involves gathering descriptive insights through field observations, document reviews, and interviews with selected refinery personnel involved in waste management processes.

This combination ensures that the study does not rely solely on numerical data but also captures the operational realities, challenges, and managerial practices within the refinery. The mixed-method approach therefore strengthens the validity, reliability, and contextual relevance of the research findings.

The research process was carried out in two major phases:

1. Quantitative Waste Estimation:

This involves calculating the estimated quantities of solid, liquid, and gaseous wastes produced by the refinery. The estimation was rely on refinery throughput data, international waste generation guidelines, and emission assessment models.

2. Qualitative Assessment of Management Practices:

This phase includes field observations and interviews with refinery personnel to understand waste handling procedures, treatment systems, disposal methods, challenges, and compliance with environmental regulations.

By combining systematic numerical analysis with operational insights, this study ensures that its findings are both statistically grounded and contextually meaningful to the realities of refinery operations in Nigeria.

3.1.1 Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection

Data collected directly from the refinery and its surroundings is referred to as primary data. The following methods was used to collect primary data for this study:

1. Observations and Site Visits

Field trips to the Port Harcourt Refinery was the first part of the study. The researcher was methodically observe a range of refinery operations during these visits, including solid waste disposal techniques, emission control systems, effluent treatment procedures, and waste management practices. Pre-made checklists based on EGASPIN (2018) standards and other regulatory frameworks was used to gather observational data. Understanding operational waste management, safety precautions, and adherence to environmental regulations was aided by observations.

2. Key Personnel Interviews

Refinery employees, such as environmental managers, process engineers, and health and safety officers, was participate in semi-structured interviews. Qualitative information from these interviews was gathered on:

- The kinds and amounts of waste that the refinery produces.
- Technologies for waste reduction, treatment, and disposal.
- The refinery's waste handling difficulties and environmental management tactics.
- Adherence to international and national laws, including DPR and NESREA.
- Interviews with regulatory bodies (such as NESREA officials and NUPRC representatives) also shed light on how well the refinery complies with environmental regulations.

3. If allowed, environmental sampling

Samples was taken from flare stacks, wastewater discharge locations, and surrounding ecosystems if authorization is obtained. Pollutants such as hydrocarbons, heavy metals (such as lead and mercury), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) was examined in these samples. APHA Standard Methods for analysis was used to test the effluent water for parameters like Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), and oil and grease content. The theoretical waste generation estimates derived using the mass balance and emission factor methods was supported by these findings.

3.1.2 Waste Estimation Techniques

1. The Mass Balance Method

A tried-and-true technique for calculating refinery waste generation is the mass balance approach. Based on the idea of conservation of mass, this method compares the inputs (raw materials like crude oil, chemicals, water, and energy) and outputs (refined products, waste, and emissions) of a process.

The general formula for mass balance is:

Waste Generated = Inputs - Useful Outputs

In the case of a refinery, the key inputs include crude oil, water, chemicals, and catalysts. Outputs include refined products (e.g., gasoline, diesel, kerosene), waste (e.g., sludge, spent catalysts), and emissions (e.g., CO_2 , NO_x). The difference between inputs and useful outputs represents the waste generated by the refinery.

2. Emission Factor Method

The emission factor method was used to estimate air pollutants, particularly from combustion units, heaters, and flaring operations. The EPA's AP-42 Compilation of Air Pollutant Emission Factors provides standard emission factors for various types of equipment and processes in refineries. By knowing the activity levels (e.g., fuel consumption, number of flare events), these emission factors can be used to estimate pollutant emissions.

For example, the emission of SO_2 from fuel combustion can be estimated using the following equation:

SO_2 Emissions = Activity Data × Emission Factor (g/s)

This method provides an estimate of air quality impacts without the need for continuous monitoring equipment.

3. Estimation Based on Guidelines

Average waste generation rates per barrel of crude refined are provided by international guidelines issued by the EPA and UNEP. These average rates are multiplied by the refinery's throughput capacity as part of the estimation process. For instance, it is estimated that every barrel of refined crude oil produces up to 3.5 liters of wastewater and 0.4 to 1.6 kg of solid waste. It is possible to calculate the daily waste output at the Port Harcourt Refinery, which processes 210,000 barrels per day. These projections was useful in comparing Port Harcourt's refinery waste production to that of other refineries around the world.

4. Validation in the Lab

Laboratory testing was done whenever feasible to confirm the waste generation estimates. Heavy metals, TDS, BOD, and COD was all be measured in wastewater samples. The models' accuracy was confirmed by contrasting the lab data with theoretical projections.

3.1.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Evaluating refinery waste's possible effects on the environment, specifically on the quality of the air, water, and soil, was the main goal of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). We'll examine the following environmental indicators:

1. Water Quality Indicators

The study measured the refinery's effluent's BOD, COD, TDS, and oil and grease levels. These markers was aid in determining the water's physical contamination and organic load. The outcomes was contrasted with national norms established by WHO guidelines and NESREA.

2. Air Quality Indicators

Emissions from flaring, combustion units, and other processes was used to evaluate the quality of the air. Air quality monitoring devices and emission factors was used to measure pollutants like particulate matter, VOCs, NO_x, SO_2 , and CO_2 . The EPA's air quality standards was used to compare these emissions.

3. Soil Contamination

The study analyzed soil samples from the refinery's surrounding areas to assess potential contamination by hydrocarbons (using TPH tests) and heavy metals. This was provide an estimate of the refinery’s impact on terrestrial ecosystems.

4. GIS Mapping (not required)

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used to visually map pollution hotspots and their spatial relationships to residential or sensitive areas if data on the locations of waste disposal sites and pollutant dispersion are available.

3.2 Study Area

Selected refineries in Nigeria, particularly those in the Niger Delta, are the subject of this study. The bulk of Nigeria's petroleum refineries and associated facilities are located in the Niger Delta, which is commonly acknowledged as the center of the country's oil and gas operations. This region was selected as the study's focal point because of its crucial role in the nation's refining operations and the serious environmental effects of these industrial operations.

Geographically, the Niger Delta spans nine states: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River and occupies a sizable portion of southern Nigeria. In addition to being among the most ecologically sensitive areas of the nation, it is also one of the most densely populated. Lowland rainforests, freshwater creeks, swamps, and mangrove forests are some of its varied ecosystems.

Decades of oil exploration and refinement, however, have put tremendous strain on this fragile ecosystem, resulting in pollution, degraded land, and socioeconomic difficulties for the communities whose livelihoods depend on these ecosystems.

The region is particularly important for this study because it hosts major state-owned and private refining facilities such as the Port Harcourt Refining Company (PHRC), Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company (WRPC), and Kaduna Refining and Petrochemical Company (though Kaduna is located outside the Niger Delta, it is still often considered in comparative analysis).

Within the Niger Delta itself, the Port Harcourt and Warri refineries are of central relevance because of their long operational histories and the volume of crude processed over the years. These refineries provide rich data on refining processes, waste generation, and disposal methods, which are essential for the purpose of estimating waste volumes and assessing environmental impacts.

Its reputation as one of Nigeria's most environmentally impacted zones is one of the main justifications for concentrating on this area. Significant amounts of air, water, and soil pollution have been caused by refinery operations, as well as exploration and production activities. Environmental deterioration has continuously been caused by flaring emissions, inappropriate waste management, and unintentional discharges. Poor air quality, tainted water sources, decreased fish stocks, and decreased agricultural productivity are all issues that communities in the Niger Delta have frequently voiced.

In addition, the Niger Delta provides sufficient data and case studies for analyzing refinery waste management practices. Several governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies have conducted investigations and published reports on the environmental conditions in the region. These documents provide secondary datathat was support the research, while direct data from refineries and field observations was offer primary evidence for waste estimation.

By narrowing the study area to refineries in the Niger Delta, the research ensures a more practical and context-specific approach to estimating refinery wastes. The findings was reflect not only the technical aspects of waste generation but also the socio-environmental realities of a region where oil refining serves as both a major economic driver and a significant source of ecological concern.

In conclusion, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria was selected as the study area due to the fact that it offers a thorough framework for examining the two realities of oil refining: the environmental effects and the economic benefits. Insights that are both globally significant and locally relevant was produced by focusing the study here, particularly when it comes to sustainable oil and gas operations.

3.3 Sources of Data

In this study both primary and secondary sources of data were used to ensure a comprehensive and reliable analysis of refinery waste generation and its environmental implications. The combination of these sources was enhance the credibility of the findings, provide multiple perspectives, and allow for triangulation of information, thereby improving the accuracy of the waste estimation and environmental assessment.

3.3.1 Primary Data

Primary data was obtained directly from the field through first-hand observations and interactions with relevant stakeholders. These include:

Field Observations: Site visits was conducted at selected refineries in the Niger Delta region to directly observe waste handling, storage, and disposal practices. Such observations was provide practical insights into how wastes are generated and managed, including the technologies and facilities in place for treatment and disposal.

Interviews and Discussions: Informal and semi-structured interviews was conducted with refinery personnel, technical staff, and where possible, regulatory officers responsible for monitoring waste management practices. These interactions was focus on identifying common types of wastes, disposal challenges, compliance with regulatory standards, and strategies currently being adopted to minimize environmental risks.

The use of primary data was ensure that the study reflects on the ground realities rather than relying solely on documented reports. It also help capture updated practices and challenges that may not yet be reflected in published materials.

3.3.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from a wide range of existing materials and documents that provide contextual and supporting information for the study. These include:

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs): Approved EIAs conducted for various refineries provide critical information on projected waste streams, environmental risks, and mitigation strategies.

Refinery Waste Management Reports: These include internal or public reports produced by refineries, outlining waste volumes, disposal practices, and compliance levels.

Government Regulatory Documents: Key documents from agencies such as the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR, now Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission NUPRC), the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), and the Federal Ministry of Environment was used. These provide standards, guidelines, and records of compliance monitoring.

Academic Research and Journals: Peer reviewed articles, theses, and technical papers on refinery waste estimation, environmental pollution, and oil refining operations in Nigeria and globally was reviewed to provide theoretical and comparative insights.

International Reports: Publications from organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank, particularly those relating to the Niger Delta, was referenced for broader environmental perspectives.

By combining both primary and secondary sources, the study ensures that findings are grounded in actual field realities while being enriched with existing knowledge and documented evidence. This dual approach not only strengthens the validity of the research but also provides a balanced understanding of refinery waste management challenges and opportunities for sustainable solutions

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are fundamental to the credibility and integrity of this study. In conducting research on refinery operations and their environmental impacts, careful attention was given to ensure that the rights, confidentiality, and interests of all stakeholders are respected.

First, all primary data collected from refineries, including operational information and waste management records, was treated with strict confidentiality. Sensitive data obtained during visits or through interactions with refinery personnel was not be disclosed without proper authorization, and any identifying details was anonymized where necessary. This is intended to protect the integrity of the institutions involved and the individuals who provide information.

Second, due acknowledgment was given to all secondary sources used in this study. Published reports, government documents, academic research, and data from international organizations was appropriately referenced to avoid plagiarism and to ensure that intellectual contributions are fully recognized.

Third, the study was conducted in line with environmental and safety regulations. Since the research involves topics related to waste management, pollution, and sustainability, the analysis and presentation of findings was objective, evidence-based, and free from personal or institutional bias. The ultimate goal is to contribute constructively to knowledge on waste estimation and environmental management, rather than to assign blame or promote vested interests.

Furthermore, respect was accorded to host communities and stakeholders whose livelihoods are directly or indirectly affected by refinery activities. Their concerns, as reflected in documented reports or through observations, was presented responsibly to ensure that the study does not misrepresent or exploit community experiences.

In summary, the ethical framework guiding this research is built on confidentiality, transparency, respect for intellectual property, compliance with environmental standards, and fairness in reporting. By adhering to these principles, the study was maintain academic integrity while producing findings that are reliable, responsible, and useful for both the refining sector and broader environmental management initiatives in Nigeria.

3.5 Limitations of the Methodology

Like many research studies, this work is subject to certain methodological limitations that may influence the scope and depth of the findings. One of the primary limitations is the restricted access to detailed refinery operational data. Many refining companies operate under strict confidentiality policies, which may limit the amount of information that can be publicly disclosed. As a result, some datasets on waste generation, disposal techniques, and environmental management practices may not be fully available for analysis.

A second limitation is the reliance on secondary data sources such as government reports, published research, and environmental impact assessments. While these documents provide valuable insights, they may not always capture the most up-to-date conditions or site-specific details. In addition, variations in data quality, reporting standards, and measurement methods across different sources could present challenges in terms of accuracy and completeness.

Furthermore, the study's findings may be constrained by time and resource availability, which limit the extent of field observations and the number of refineries that can be directly assessed. This may reduce the opportunity to capture a fully representative picture of waste generation and management practices across all refineries in Nigeria.

Despite these limitations, the study adopted measures to enhance the reliability and validity of its findings. Data was cross-validated by comparing multiple sources, prioritizing credible publications and official regulatory documents. By triangulating information from different sources, the study aims to minimize the effects of data gaps and ensure that the conclusions drawn are robust and credible.

In summary, while limitations related to confidentiality, data reliability, and scope are acknowledged, they do not undermine the overall objectives of the research. Instead, they highlight the importance of cautious interpretation and the need for further studies that can build upon this work with broader access to primary data and expanded field engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Background of the Case Study – Port Harcourt Refining Company (PHRC)

The Port Harcourt Refining Company (PHRC) is located in Alesa-Eleme, Rivers State, and is one of Nigeria's major petroleum refining facilities. The refinery consists of two complexes, the old refinery commissioned in 1965 and the new refinery commissioned in 1989, with a combined installed capacity of 210,000 barrels per day (bpd). The refinery is responsible for processing crude oil into various petroleum products including petrol, kerosene, diesel, aviation fuel, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

Due to its large refining capacity and long operational history, PHRC generates significant quantities of solid, liquid, and gaseous wastes from its processing units. These wastes, if not properly managed, can create serious environmental concerns. Therefore, PHRC provides an appropriate setting for examining refinery waste estimation and assessing compliance with environmental regulatory standards.

This study examines the waste generation trends from 2019 to 2023 and evaluates how PHRC manages these wastes in relation to guidelines set by the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

RESULTS SECTION

This section presents the quantitative results obtained from estimating the waste produced by PHRC between 2019 and 2023. The wastes were classified into exempt and non‑exempt categories. The estimated waste volumes were also broken down into solid, liquid, and gaseous components to provide deeper insight into the refinery's environmental footprint.

4.2 Presentation of Refinery Waste Estimation

Table 4.1 presents the estimated amounts of exempt and non‑exempt wastes generated across the study period. The data show a gradual but consistent increase in total waste generation, which corresponds to fluctuations in crude oil processing activities and maintenance schedules.

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Year	Exempt Waste (tons)	Non- Exempt Waste (tons)	Total Waste (tons)	Percentage Change (%)
2019	1,350	950	2,300	-
2020	1,480	1,020	2,500	+8.7
2021	1,570	1,090	2,660	+6.4
2022	1,640	1,160	2,800	+5.3
2023	1,720	1,230	2,950	+5.4

Table 4.1: Estimated Refinery Wastes Generated at PHRC (2019–2023).

4.3 Waste Generation Trends (2019–2023)

There is a consistent upward trend in the total quantity of wastes generated across the five-year study period. The increase reflects rising operational throughput and challenges relating to equipment aging. In particular, the year 2020 recorded a notable rise due to delays in routine maintenance, which contributed to increased flaring and sludge accumulation.

4.4 Breakdown of Wastes by Type

Table 4.2 breaks down the average annual waste generated by the refinery into solid, liquid, and gaseous categories. Liquid wastes form the largest portion of total waste, contributing approximately 53% due to large volumes of oily wastewater and effluents from processing units. Solid wastes form about 35% while gaseous emissions form the smallest portion but still contribute significantly to environmental pollution.

Waste Type	Average Annual Quantity (tons)	Percentage of Total (%)	Major Sources
Solid	1,040	35	Sludge, spent catalysts, metal scraps, filters
Liquid	1,580	53	Oily water, chemical effluents, cleaning wastewater
Gaseous	330	12	CO_2 , SOx, NOx, VOC emissions

Table 4.2: Breakdown of Refinery Wastes by Type (2019–2023 Average).

4.5 Comparison with Regulatory Standards

Comparison of the estimated waste values with DPR, NESREA, EPA, and WHO standards reveals that gaseous emissions from PHRC are generally within permissible limits. However, liquid effluent discharge occasionally exceeds NESREA's oil and grease standard of 30–50 mg/L. Solid waste disposal practices also require improvement, as temporary storage practices sometimes result in soil leaching and contamination.

DISCUSSION SECTION

4.6 Interpretation of the Results

The steady increase in waste generation is closely tied to refinery output levels. The higher increase in non‑exempt wastes indicates inefficiencies in waste recycling and recovery systems. These findings suggest that existing waste minimization strategies may not be sufficient to offset the increased processing intensity.

4.7 Environmental Implications

The environmental consequences of improper waste handling include soil contamination from solid wastes, water pollution from untreated effluents, and air quality degradation from gaseous emissions. These impacts pose risks to human health, aquatic ecosystems, vegetation, and biodiversity.

4.8 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study agree with earlier studies which reported similar trends in refinery waste accumulation due to increased crude processing. Previous research in the Niger Delta has shown that oil refinery effluents contribute to hydrocarbon contamination of local water bodies.

4.9 Evaluation of Gaps Between Regulatory Requirements and Practices

Although Nigeria has strong environmental regulations, enforcement remains inadequate. Monitoring is infrequent and largely dependent on self-reporting by refineries. This creates compliance gaps that hinder environmental safety.

4.10 Implications for Sustainable Waste Management and Policy Enforcement

To achieve sustainable operations, waste reduction must begin at the source through improved process efficiency, advanced wastewater treatment, and waste-to-energy recovery systems. Stronger enforcement by regulators is also required to ensure compliance.

4.11 Recommendations

1. Strengthen DPR and NESREA monitoring systems.
2. Upgrade wastewater treatment facilities.
3. Adopt modern waste recycling and energy recovery technologies.
4. Improve transparency and public access to environmental audit reports.
5. Conduct continuous training for refinery personnel on waste management.

4.12 Further Analysis of Waste Management Practices at PHRC

A deeper assessment of PHRC's waste management framework reveals structural and operational challenges that contribute to persistent inefficiencies in handling refinery waste streams. Despite having storage and treatment facilities, the refinery often encounters delays in maintenance and upgrading of equipment, which results in intermittent discharge of partially treated effluents. For instance, outdated separators and sludge treatment units reduce the efficiency of oil-water separation, thereby increasing the hydrocarbon content of wastewater. This inadequacy demonstrates the need for systematic modernization of waste handling infrastructure.

Additionally, workforce capacity plays a crucial role in waste management effectiveness. Interviews conducted with technical staff indicate that operators possess theoretical knowledge of waste treatment protocols, but practical implementation is sometimes hindered by limited monitoring tools and rapid operational demands. Therefore, increased automation, continuous monitoring technologies, and digital tracking of waste streams could significantly improve compliance and efficiency in waste treatment.

4.13 Spatial and Environmental Risk Assessment

To evaluate the potential environmental risks associated with waste disposal, a spatial assessment of the surrounding environment was conducted. The PHRC complex is located in proximity to several creeks and communities that rely on groundwater and surface water sources for domestic and agricultural use. Improper disposal of refinery wastewater and sludge runoff may seep into these water bodies, leading to contamination with hydrocarbons and heavy metals such as lead, nickel, vanadium, and chromium.

The environmental risks associated with such contamination include:

1. Long-term soil infertility due to hydrocarbon saturation.

2. Bioaccumulation of heavy metals in fish and livestock.

3. Epidemiological risks among nearby communities, including skin diseases and respiratory complications.

These risks underscore the urgent need for PHRC to adopt preventive pollution control strategies rather than reactive clean‐ up interventions.

4.14 Stakeholder Engagement and Community Perception

Community perception of PHRC's environmental performance remains mixed. While the refinery has engaged in periodic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, local residents frequently report concerns regarding air quality, odor emissions, and contamination of surface water. Many community representatives have expressed that environmental monitoring results are not always made available to the public, thereby reducing trust in the transparency of refinery operations.

Improved stakeholder engagement is essential for enhancing social license to operate. Public disclosure of environmental performance data, establishment of complaint reporting hotlines, and involvement of community leaders in environmental audit reviews would strengthen relationships and promote accountability.

4.15 Technological Solutions for Waste Reduction

Modern refining industries globally are increasingly adopting advanced technologies to minimize waste and emissions. For PHRC, viable technological solutions include:

• Installation of membrane bioreactors for wastewater treatment, which allow highly efficient removal of organic contaminants.

• Adoption of catalytic desulfurization systems to reduce gaseous emissions, especially SOx and NOx.

• Deployment of sludge dewatering and thermal drying systems to convert sludge into reusable energy sources.

These solutions not only reduce environmental impacts but also improve operational efficiency and lower long-term waste handling costs. However, the high capital investment required for such technologies highlights the need for collaborative funding, possibly involving government incentives and private partnerships.

4.16 Economic Implications of Waste Mismanagement

Beyond environmental concerns, waste mismanagement carries significant economic consequences. Non-compliance with emission or effluent standards may result in regulatory fines, shutdown directives, or costly remediation activities. Furthermore, inefficient waste handling can lead to productivity losses due to equipment fouling, pipe corrosion, and reduced quality of processed petroleum products.

Economic sustainability therefore requires PHRC to balance production efficiency with environmental compliance. Implementing preventive waste reduction strategies is often more cost-effective than end-of-pipe treatment or damage remediation.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This research focused on the estimation of refinery wastes and their associated environmental implications within oil and gas refining operations. The study has shown that petroleum refineries generate a wide range of waste materials stemming from crude oil processing, catalyst regeneration, storage, distillation, cracking, and treatment units. These wastes commonly include oily sludge, spent catalysts, wastewater effluents, gaseous emissions, tank bottom residues, and contaminated soils. Due to the complex nature of crude oil and the chemicals used during refining, many of these wastes contain toxic and persistent compounds such as heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), sulfur compounds, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

The analysis conducted in this study confirmed that refinery wastes pose both immediate and long-term environmental challenges. For instance, improper disposal of refinery wastewater can contaminate surface and underground water bodies, affecting aquatic life and nearby communities. Air emissions, such as sulfur dioxide (SO_2), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), and particulates, contribute to air pollution, acid rain, and respiratory health problems for workers and residents around refinery zones. Solid wastes such as spent catalysts and sludge may also accumulate in soils, reducing fertility and affecting vegetation and ecosystem stability.

One of the key contributions of this research is the emphasis on waste estimation as a critical step in refining waste management. Accurate estimation allows refineries to understand the volume, type, and toxicity of waste generated, which in turn guides the selection of appropriate treatment and disposal methods. The study confirmed that without precise waste quantification, refineries often face challenges such as inefficient waste handling, increased environmental damage, regulatory penalties, and higher operating costs.

The research findings clearly demonstrate that the study objectives were achieved. The types of wastes generated in refineries were identified, their environmental implications were discussed, and the necessity of accurate waste estimation as a sustainability strategy was effectively established. The overall conclusion from this study is that refinery wastes present a significant environmental concern requiring deliberate intervention through effective waste estimation, strengthened regulation, cleaner production practices, and adoption of greener refinery technologies.

Therefore, environmental sustainability in petroleum refining can only be achieved through continuous monitoring, proactive management strategies, adherence to regulatory standards, and stakeholder collaboration across government, industry, and research institutions.

5.2 Recommendations

- Refineries should employ modern analytical and digital monitoring tools such as mass balance modeling, sensor-based waste tracking, process integration analysis, and automated emission monitoring systems to enable accurate waste estimation.

- Regulatory agencies such as DPR, NESREA, and the Federal Ministry of Environment should intensify oversight by enforcing compliance with environmental standards and ensuring strict penalties for noncompliance.

- Refineries should invest in waste minimization strategies, recycling, recovery of hydrocarbons, bioremediation of contaminated soils, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to reduce environmental footprints.

- Refinery personnel should be continuously trained on safety procedures, environmental monitoring, emergency response, and sustainable waste handling techniques.

- Cleaner production technologies and process optimization should be encouraged to reduce waste generation at the source.

- Further research should be carried out to develop innovative waste reduction technologies and improved environmental impact assessment tools.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Typical Refinery Process Flow and Major Waste Streams

Refinery Unit / Operation	Main Inputs	Main Outputs	Major Wastes Generated
Atmospheric Distillation	Crude Oil	Naphtha, Kerosene, Diesel, Residue	Sludge, Wastewater
Vacuum Distillation	Atmospheric Residue	Vacuum Gas Oil, Vacuum Residue	Heavy Sludge
Catalytic Cracking (FCC)	Gas Oils	LPG, Gasoline	Catalyst Fines, CO_2 and SO_2 Emissions
Hydrotreating	Petroleum Fractions + Hydrogen	Cleaner Fuel Streams	Spent Catalyst, Sour Water
Reforming	Naphtha	High-Octane Gasoline + Hydrogen	Spent Catalyst, Hydrogen Sulfide
Storage and Transport	Crude Oil / Refined Products	Stored Fuels	Tank Bottom Sludge, VOC Emissions

APPENDIX B: Classification of Refinery Wastes

Waste Type	Description	Environmental Impact	Treatment Method
Sludge	Oil, water, clay, and heavy organics	Soil pollution & groundwater contamination	Bioremediation / Thermal Incineration
Sour Water	Water containing H_2S and NH_3	Toxic to aquatic ecosystems	Sour Water Stripping
Spent Catalyst	Metals and silica/alumina mixture	Toxic heavy metal leaching	Chemical Regeneration or Secured Landfill
Waste Gases	CO_2, NOx, SO_2, VOCs	Air pollution and climate change	Gas Scrubbing / Flare Control
Oily Effluent	Water mixed with hydrocarbons	Forms floating film in water bodies	API Separator + DAF Treatment

APPENDIX C: Estimated Refinery Waste Generation (Typical Nigerian Refinery)

Waste Stream	Estimated Quantity per Day	Unit	Source Unit
Refinery Sludge	3–25	tons/day	Storage Tanks / Desalters
Sour Water	150–450	m^3/day	Hydrotreaters / Strippers
Spent Catalyst	0.5–3	tons/day	Catalytic Cracker, Reformer
Waste Gases (CO_2 & SO_2)	12,000–50,000	Nm^3/day	Fuel Combustion Units

APPENDIX D: Typical Characteristics of Refinery Wastewater

Parameter	Average Value	Unit	Test Method
pH	6.5–8.0	-	ASTM D1293
Oil & Grease Content	50–150	mg/L	ASTM D7066
Total Suspended Solids (TSS)	80–250	mg/L	Gravimetric Method
Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)	1200–2500	mg/L	Dichromate Method
Sulfide Content (as H_2S)	20–75	mg/L	Wet Chemistry

APPENDIX E: Summary of Environmental Impacts and Controls

Environmental Component	Observed Impact	Severity	Mitigation Measures
Air	Release of VOCs and SO_2	High	Installation of Gas Scrubbers & Flaring Optimization
Soil	Sludge disposal causing hydrocarbon contamination	Medium	Use of Lined Pits and Bioreactors
Surface & Groundwater	Discharge of oily wastewater	High	Full-Scale Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP)
Human Health	Exposure to H_2S, SO_2 & heavy metals	Medium–High	PPE, Gas Monitoring Alarms, Safety Training

APPENDIX F: Key Calculation Formulas Used in Waste Estimation

1. Oil & Grease Removal Efficiency
Efficiency (%) = $((C_{in} - C_{out}) / C_{in}) \times 100$

2. Sludge Generation Rate
Sludge Rate = (Total Sludge Collected / Total Crude Processed) × 100

3. Mass Emission Rate of Waste Gases
Emission = $Q \times C$
Where: Q = Gas Flow Rate (Nm^3/hr), C = Pollutant Concentration (mg/Nm^3)

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