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# Oil spill: Analysis suggests link between soaring oil production and leaks (updated)

by **KPCC Staff**

May 22 2015

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GOLETA, CALIFORNIA - MAY 19: Officials walk along an the oil-covered beach on May 19, 2015 north of Goleta, California. About 21,000 gallons spilled from an abandoned pipeline on the land near Refugio State Beach, spreading over about four miles of beach within hours. The largest oil spill ever in U.S. waters at the time occurred in the same section of the coast in 1969 where numerous offshore oil platforms can be seen, giving birth to the modern American environmental movement. (Photo by David McNew/Getty Images) **David McNew/Getty Images**

### **Update 12:45 p.m.: Data shows pipeline accidents have shot up 60 percent since 2009**

The oil pipeline leak that fouled a stretch of California coastline this week reflects a troubling trend in the nation's infrastructure: As U.S. oil production has soared, so has the number of pipeline accidents.

An analysis of federal data by the Associated Press shows that since 2009, the annual number of significant accidents on oil and petroleum pipelines has shot up by almost 60 percent, roughly matching the rise in U.S. crude oil production.

Nearly two-thirds of the leaks during that time have been linked to corrosion or material, welding and equipment failures. Those problems are often associated with older pipelines, although they also can occur in newer ones, too.

Other leaks were blamed on natural disasters or human error, such as a backhoe striking a pipeline.

— the Associated Press

### **Update 9:50 a.m.: Regulators order pipeline testing, other steps after spill**

Federal regulators have ordered the company whose pipeline spilled thousands of gallons of oil across a California coastline to take a series of steps before it can restart the line.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration announced a so-called corrective action against Plains All American Pipeline on Friday.

The order requires the company to remove the damaged section of pipe, test it and empty the remainder of the line.

The agency says it still does not know the cause of the leak, which spilled up to 105,000 gallons of crude into a coastal ditch Tuesday. Thousands of gallons flowed into the sea northwest of Santa Barbara.

— *the Associated Press*

### **Update 8:00 a.m.: Oil spill still in 'response and recovery stage'**

In a press conference Thursday night, Rick Michael with Plains All American Pipeline said that it's still in response and recovery mode. "Spill recoveries happen in stages," he said. "We're still what you call in the response and recovery stage."

So far, a total of 59 bins have been filled with contaminated soil. Six oiled pelicans have been moved to the Department of Fish and Wildlife's San Pedro facility for cleaning. An oiled juvenile sea lion is being rehabilitated as well.

Michael Ziccardi, director of Oiled Wildlife Care Network, reiterated that only trained teams should collect wildlife.

"The general public may want to help but the fact is trying to capture oiled animals by people who don't have the training is dangerous both to the animal as well as to the people," he said. "So we encourage people, if they are seeing animals, to continue to call in to our wildlife hotline."

— *KPCC staff*

## **Dead animals turning up after Santa Barbara oil spill**



*An octopus lies dead on an oil-covered beach after an oil spill near Refugio State Beach. (Photo by David McNew/Getty Images)*

Two days after a significant oil spill near Santa Barbara, biologists are on site counting the number of animals harmed by the muck.

The data gathered will help them know how much recovery will be needed in the area.

So far, the spill, estimated at 105,000 gallons, is believed to have killed two pelicans, fish and a

number of crustaceans.

During low tides at Refugio State Beach, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Jenny Marek walks the shore looking for animals.

So far she's seen dead fish, lobsters, crabs and even a few small octopuses.

"Some of them, you might not even see a speck of oil, but it will be dead on the beach," she said. "Some of them are totally covered in oil."

Marek recalled seeing one small crab caked in black goo walking on the beach. "It was just heartbreaking to see this animal dying before my eyes."



*(An oiled crab as photographed by Jenny Marek.)*

The coast near Santa Barbara is home to a variety of unique species, including the [Western Snowy Plover](#), which is federally listed as threatened.

"That is a bird that typically nests along the shoreline," said Ashley Spratt, a spokeswoman with the Ventura office of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

She said the animal is one of many that could potentially be affected by the contaminants from the pipeline.

Refugio State Beach is visited by a host mammals as well, including seals, sea lions, whales and dolphins.

Marine biologist Maddalena Bearzi pointed out that species like [dolphins feed up and down the coast](#), meaning the effects of the spill won't be isolated to this particular area.

"These animals do not avoid polluted areas, and they will likely eat the already contaminated fish," she said in an e-mail.

[A recent study](#) showed that the BP Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico [contributed to a record number of dolphin deaths](#).

The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service has yet to compile all the numbers gathered on animals found oiled in Santa Barbara County.

When they do, they will use that information to guide restoration efforts.

"Understanding the impact of how the oil has affected our natural resources is a really key component," said Marek.

This baseline will help scientists understand how much work will be needed to restore the ecosystem to its level before the spill.

Most of the oiled animals found in the area cannot be saved. However, the Fish and Wildlife Service confirmed that five brown pelicans have been rescued and sent to a facility for cleaning and rehabilitation.

Volunteers who encounter an oil covered animal are asked not to interfere with it, but rather call the Oiled Wildlife Care Network Hotline at 877-823-6926.

— *Sanden Totten, KPCC*

## Removing oil from the ocean

Plains All American Pipeline has had 175 safety and maintenance problems since 2006, resulting in more than 460,000 gallons of spilled oil. A government website shows the company has been able to recover about 90 percent of lost oil.

Carl Weimer, executive director of Pipeline Safety Trust, said that the recovery rate in the Santa Barbara spill is likely to be much lower because of the amount that entered the ocean.

“They’re not going to get anywhere near 90 percent, because usually once it gets into water and spreads out, they get a fairly low percentage back,” Weimer said. “Water certainly changes the game, because it spreads it out far. Some of it will start to evaporate; some of it will sink if it gets mixed with sediments.”

Officials said an estimated 21,000 gallons of oil entered the Pacific Ocean. By Thursday afternoon, recovery teams working around the clock had removed more than 8,300 gallons of oil and water from the ocean. It’s not yet clear how much of that mixture was oil.

It’s estimated that a quarter of the oil from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill was removed through human intervention. Most of the removed oil was recovered directly from the wellhead. Only three percent of the oil was taken by skimming.

Mary Fricke, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Office of Spill Prevention and Response, wrote in an email that too many variables exist to make an effective estimate of how much oil from this week’s spill will be removed from the ocean.

She wrote:

“It is difficult to give a general percentage. There are a lot of factors involved, such as the product spilled, weather conditions, season, direction of the tides, wind speed, type of shoreline, such as sand beach, tidal flat, or vegetated riparian, exposure to waves, tidal energy or turbulence and sensitivity of living resources. Basically, each oil spill is unique with regard to the amount recovered.”

— *Jed Kim, KPCC*

*This story has been updated.*

With contributions by [Sanden Totten](#) and [Jed Kim](#)

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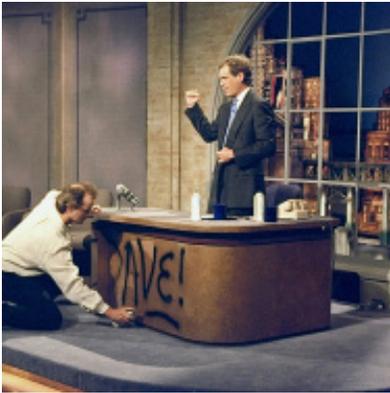
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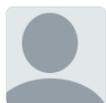
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Ryan4Prez • 5 days ago

Aaaaand... nothing will be done about it. Oh, maybe a nice slap on the wrist or a fine, but the damage is done and they'll be back up and running in no time. If it were up to me, the company would be liquidated, equity burned to the ground, and each executive drawn and quartered on live TV... but then again, they would never pay for me to be in office, so I guess they're safe... for now

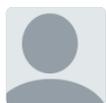
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Annie S. • 5 days ago

...And now an oil platform fire threatening Breton National Wildlife Refuge. Glad everyone is safe, but it's just a shame what this is doing to innocent aquatic and terrestrial wildlife and organisms. As USFWS biologist Jenny Marek said, "It was just heartbreaking to see this animal dying before my eyes."

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Ninadog • 5 days ago

Dam -it!!

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