



SENATE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
95814

Background

On May 19, 2015, a pipeline owned by Houston-based Plains All American Pipeline ruptured spilling, by some estimates, 101,000 gallons of heavy crude oil along the Gaviota coast in Santa Barbara County. It is also estimated that as much as 21,000 gallons of the oil that came out of the pipe went down a storm culvert, onto cliffs, and into the Pacific Ocean. The immediate oil spill area stretched over nine miles of California coastline and tar balls have washed up as far as one hundred miles from the spill site. The pipeline that ruptured is known as Line 901 and is a common carrier pipeline that transports oil that was produced on platforms offshore in both state and federal waters to be refined in either Santa Maria or Kern County. Although the first indications of a spill were known to the Responsible Party at 10:45 am, the spill was reported to the National Response Center at 2:56 p.m. on May 19 and to the State Warning Center at approximately the same time. Federal agencies established a Unified Command, which consisted of federal, state and local agencies, tribal representatives, and Plains All American Pipeline, LLC.

On May 27th officials received reports of a tar-like substance washing up on Manhattan Beach. Department of Fish and Game wardens responded, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health closed an eight-mile stretch of South Bay beaches from El Segundo south to Torrance Beach. The beaches were closed for two days as tar balls washed ashore, blanketing the sand. One week later, tar balls washed ashore in Long Beach, closing four miles of shoreline, and continued to pop up on beaches as far south as San Clemente.

A separate Unified Command post was set up in Manhattan Beach to focus on response efforts in the South Bay, and the nearby Chevron facility activated its response plan to determine if the tar balls were a result of seepage from their local facilities. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, tar balls are remnants of oil spills or seepage. Crude oil, when mixed with water, thickens due to wind and waves in a process called "weathering."

The U.S. Coast Guard collected samples of the tar balls in the South Bay and Los Angeles County Lifeguards worked with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, L.A. County Department of Beaches and Harbors, L.A. County Fire Department Health Hazardous Materials Division and County of L.A. Public Health Department to determine if the tar balls were a result of the Refugio oil spill, the Chevron facilities, or a natural occurrence. Low levels of tar balls are

a common occurrence on Southern California beaches from natural sources, such as offshore seepage from fissures in the seabed.

Plains All American sent several South Bay tar ball samples to labs in Massachusetts and UC Santa Barbara. Those labs conducted chemical “fingerprinting,” which determines the source of shoreline crude after a spill. The state sent samples to the Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory in Rancho Cordova for “fingerprinting” analysis and compared the tar balls with samples of known natural seeps and other potential sources of oil in the area. On June 22, officials announced that the test results determined that some samples did not match local natural seep oil or oil from vessels that had been nearby, and at least three official samples and two tested by Plains All American matched the Refugio Oil Spill.

California’s Lempert-Keene-Seastrand Oil Spill Prevention and Response Act requires pipeline owners to develop, submit and implement an Oil Spill Contingency Plan. The law requires the party who causes oil to be discharged in or on the waters of the state to immediately report the spill to the California Office of Emergency Services and immediately contain, clean up, and remove the oil in the most effective manner that minimizes environmental damage, and in accordance with the applicable contingency plans, unless ordered otherwise by the U.S. Coast Guard or the Administrator of Office of Spill Prevention and Response. Plains All American Pipeline does have an Oil Spill Contingency Plan and will pay for cost of clean-up and damages.

Unified Command is currently in the process of completing a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) for the oil spill. NRDA is the legal process that federal agencies, together with the states and Native American tribes, use to evaluate the impacts of oil spills on natural resources. NRDA identifies the extent of natural resource injuries, the best methods for restoring them, and the type and amount of restoration required. In addition to studying impacts to the environment, the NRDA process includes assessing and restoring the public's lost use of injured natural resources (e.g., closed recreational fishing or swimming). A final restoration plan is anticipated to be completed by early 2017.