



PRESS STATEMENT

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Environmentalists Address Oil Safety Concerns Urge Transition to Clean Energy

The Environmental Defense Center (EDC), a public interest environmental law firm headquartered in Santa Barbara, delivered the following statement at a forum hosted today by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE, formerly the Minerals Management Service or MMS).

Santa Barbara County is home to the first offshore oil drilling in the country. We currently have 20 platforms producing oil and gas from more than 40 leases. The Santa Barbara Channel is also home to the Channel Islands National Park, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, and Santa Barbara Federal Ecological Preserve. This area is one of the most important bioregions on the planet and boasts the highest biodiversity in the mainland United States.

Placing oil drilling in the midst of this incredible environment creates unacceptable risks and impacts. In 1969, shortly after the first offshore oil platform was installed, a blow-out occurred at Platform A. This incident became known as “the spill that was heard around the world.” The blow-out occurred because the technology didn’t work, and regulatory oversight failed – the exact same confluence of factors that resulted in the Deepwater Horizon blow-out in the Gulf of Mexico this April, almost exactly 41 years later.

Not only is it impossible to *prevent* an oil spill, we still can’t effectively *clean up* a spill. In recognition of this fact, the California Coastal Commission objected to the

renewal of 36 federal oil leases in 2005, in large part because “current state-of-the-art response measures cannot effectively protect California’s shoreline and coastal resources from significant oil spill impacts.” In fact, only 10-15% of spilled oil is typically recovered, to this day.

What lessons have we learned in the last 41 years? First, oil spills cannot be prevented, even with state-of-the-art technology. Second, according to a MMS report in 2009, the majority of spills are caused by human error and actions. Third, the consequences of a major oil spill remain massive. As with the Valdez spill, we won’t know the true impacts of the Deepwater Horizon blow-out for years and decades to come.

Where do we go from here?

(1) Prevention: we need an end to new oil leasing, and we need to phase out existing production. We urge the Administration to support S. 3358, the West Coast Ocean Protection Act sponsored by all six west coast Senators.

(2) Make existing oil development safer: we need more than cosmetic and organizational changes. Re-arranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic won’t work. We need real policy that reduces the risks of offshore oil drilling. Because of the inherent dangers and risks, the industry requires more inspections, third party monitoring and reporting, and regulatory oversight. In particular for the Santa Barbara Channel oil operations, we need to re-open the Santa Maria inspection office to ensure regular inspections of the offshore platforms in our area.

(3) Transition to clean energy future: Congress must pass a clean energy bill this year. We cannot afford to wait any longer. We need to switch our energy reliance from fossil fuels to energy efficiency and renewable energy. This transition will protect the environment, reduce climate change, provide jobs and stimulate the economy, and improve our national security.