



## CALIFORNIA

# Ruling forces firm to delay offshore oil restart near Santa Barbara



Sable Offshore Corp. oil platform "Harmony" off the coast of Refugio State Beach. (Michael Owen Baker / For The Times)

**By Grace Toohey**  
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For the [second time in a week](#), a judge has sided with environmental groups that are challenging [an offshore oil operation](#) along Santa Barbara County's coastline by granting a temporary restraining order against the company.

On Tuesday, Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Donna Geck ordered Sable Offshore Corp. and the Office of the State Fire Marshal to halt restart efforts on the operation's onshore pipeline system, which suffered a major rupture and spill in 2015.

Sable has been [working to reactivate the so-called Santa Ynez Unit](#) — a complex of three offshore platforms, processing facilities and pipelines — that was shuttered after the spill. The fire marshal [regulates](#) oil and gas pipelines across the state and must approve the pipelines' full restart, which is key to the company's commercial success.

The court's temporary restraining order on pipeline work will remain in effect through at least July 18, when Geck will call a full hearing on the matter. The order could be extended.

Sable officials said in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing that the decision would force them to push back their restart timeline.

"Sable is now targeting August 1, 2025 for first sales due to this delay," the filing said. Last month, the company called for commercial operations to begin in July as it announced it had — to the shock of environmental activists and some state officials — [begun some limited offshore oil production](#).



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Steve Rusch, Sable's vice president of environmental and governmental affairs, wrote in a statement Wednesday that the ruling would not "impede Sable's preparations for restarting the flow of oil critical to lowering California's gas prices and stabilizing supply."

The ruling was celebrated by environmental groups and plaintiffs who argued that the state fire marshal improperly issued waivers for repair work “without conducting any environmental review or public process as required by state and federal law,” according to one lawsuit.

“They cannot do anything between now and July 18, so that’s huge,” said Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center, which filed one of two lawsuits that sought a restraining order. “Everything has been happening without any public input, no public hearings, no environmental review. We’re trying to enforce laws that would require Sable to go through a public process, to be subject to scrutiny.”

The Center for Biological Diversity had filed a separate, similar lawsuit.



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“We were appalled when Sable resumed operations offshore with no public notice, so it’s a relief that the company can’t restart these onshore pipelines while the court considers this case,” read a statement from Julie Teel Simmonds, senior counsel for the center. “The public deserves to know what harms could come from the pipeline that caused such a catastrophic oil spill 10 years ago, and the decision to restart shouldn’t be made behind closed doors.”

Last week, another state judge ruled in a different lawsuit that Sable [could not do any further work](#) in the coastal region where parts of these pipelines run until its dispute with the California Coastal Commission was resolved.

In April, the Coastal Commission found that Sable had repeatedly [violated the Coastal Act](#) by repairing and upgrading oil pipelines without necessary permits or approvals,

and fined the company \$18 million. Sable has disputed those findings, arguing that it continues to follow all state and federal requirements and “exceeds industry standards.”

But the 2015 Refugio oil spill still looms large for many residents, galvanizing much opposition and concern about the project.

“The community I represent has made it clear. We do not want another oil spill off of our coast,” state Sen. Monique Limón (D-Goleta) said in a statement. The legislator is working to pass [a bill](#) that would require more rigorous testing and public input for such pipeline restarts, and she would like to see those standards applied to this project. She thinks that’s possible if these court injunctions are extended.

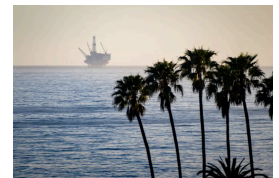
Kara Garrett, a spokesperson for the state office of the fire marshal, said the agency was still reviewing the judge’s decision “and planning for our compliance.”

“We will continue to remain focused on ensuring the safety of hazardous liquid pipelines under our authority within California,” Garrett said in a statement.

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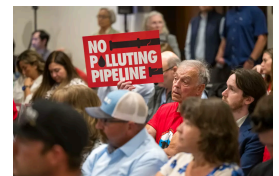
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