

126,000 gallons of oil spill off Southern California coast, fouling beaches and wetlands

Joshua Rodriguez
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On Saturday October 2, a major oil spill off the coast of Southern California spewed more than 126,000 gallons (about 3,100 barrels) of oil into the Pacific Ocean and polluted beaches in Orange County in what is being labeled as one of the worst ecological disasters in California's history.

The oil spill originated from a broken pipeline which is connected to an offshore oil platform known as Elly, three miles off the coast of Huntington Beach, and has inundated a 25-acre wetland known as the Talbert Marsh. Local residents reported a distinct smell of oil as early as Friday.

Although the pipeline has been closed off, as declared in official statements, the oil spill continues to spread and is expected to reach beaches throughout the Orange County area, and local authorities are unsure of when the oil spill will be contained.

As of Sunday morning, dead fish, birds, oil slicks, frantic wildlife and the smell of exhaust plagued the coastal areas of Southern California, potentially posing health risks to people and irreversible damage to wildlife habitats and ecosystems.

The oil spill had reached the Laguna Beach area late Sunday night, worsening the already dire situation. The state of California has issued fishing limits along the coast where the oil slick is spreading. "The closure extends out six miles and a swath of about 20 miles long," Christian Corbo, a patrol lieutenant of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, reported.

The disaster recalls the infamous Gulf of Mexico BP oil spill of 2010, which caused irreversible damage to marine life and their habitats, lost jobs and incomes for nearby residents, and serious health problems among those living in the areas along the coastal areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. The current disaster is, similarly to the 2010 spill, the

culmination of shoddy government oversight and callous business practices.

As previous ecological and social disasters have shown, there will be a concerted effort by both the mainstream media and capitalist politicians to mitigate not the environmental damages and the losses that workers will incur, but any damage that will be incurred to the profit margins of corporate parties involved.

Representative Michelle Steel, whose congressional district comprises a portion of Orange County, made a plea to President Joe Biden to assist with the disaster. While Biden had made an election pledge to scale down on hazardous fracking and offshore drilling, his administration has continued to issue drilling permits on par with those of the former George W. Bush administration.

Under the jurisdiction of the federal government, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) is the agency responsible for overseeing energy development along America's coastlines. The BSEE had issued over 22 offshore drilling permits to eight different corporations by the time Biden was inaugurated on January 20, 2021, and continues to issue such permits.

The BSEE was established to replace the Minerals Management Service in response to its failure in overseeing the disastrous BP oil spill back in 2010. However, the latest oil spill has shown that this new agency is just as incapable or unwilling as the last agency in preventing ecological disasters such as these from occurring in the first place.

The pipeline responsible for this historic oil spill is managed and operated by Beta Operating Company and its publicly traded parent company, Amplify Energy Corp.

According to Amplify Energy's March 11 fourth-quarter financial report for 2020, the Houston-based energy company states that it was able to cut its Level of Effort spending (LOE) from \$35.7 million in the fourth quarter of 2019 to a maximum of just \$28.5 million this quarter.

This means that the company spent \$7.2 million less on periodic work needed to ensure that a product or service is completed, on an infrastructure that is progressively decaying with time and use. The company also received \$5.5 million in federally backed small business loans as part of the COVID-19 pandemic Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and has not indicated whether it would return the money before the deadline, based on the company's expectation that the money would be forgiven as stated in the program's terms.

The financial report also states that the company spent a total of \$2.2 million in cash expenditures for the fourth quarter of 2020, a \$2.8 million decrease from previous reports.

Such common cost-cutting practices carried out in the pursuit of profit, coupled with deregulatory policies in the last several decades, have led to disaster after disaster in every country.

Whether it is the BP oil spill or the Pike River Mine disaster of 2010, in New Zealand, London's Grenfell Tower fire of 2017, the California Camp Fire of 2018 or the Florida Surfside condo collapse of 2021, all could have been avoided.

In each of these events, the safety and wellbeing of the general population have been considered expendable by the state and the corporations it protects in order to generate more profits for the privileged elite, and it is their pro-capitalist, political parties and representatives that downplay and disregard the heinous and neglectful crimes committed.

Only a working-class government, created and run by the workers themselves, can take the for-profit-driven energy companies out of the hands of the ruling elite and convert them into democratically controlled utilities that will be based on social need and not on private profit. For the same reason, only the working class can prevent further ecological disasters by reorganizing the world's resources to protect and revitalize the environment.



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