

# Southern California deals with fallout from massive oil spill as new details emerge

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The Southern California oil spill, which has caused an environmental catastrophe on the coastline of Orange County, has made it abundantly clear that America's infrastructure is obsolete and in urgent need of repair.

The Elly oil rig, where the spill originated, and its accompanying pipes are over 40 years old, with oil production beginning as early as January 1981. Since then, the pipes have not been replaced, updated or reinforced.

Amplify Energy Corp., the Houston-based energy company that owns the Elly oil rig, was in the process of upgrading some of its old, dilapidated oil pipes before the incident occurred, but there have been reports that oil leaks have occurred as far back as 1999 and again in 2014.

The US coastline is riddled with these dangerously managed oil rigs and the crumbling infrastructure attached to them has been ignored and left to deteriorate by their corporate owners. Near to the Elly rig is the Eureka oil rig which has had numerous problems in the past as well. Furthermore, the latest disaster recalls the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which released 206 million gallons of oil and caused incalculable damage throughout the Gulf Coast region.

Environmental advocates such as Miyoko Sakashita with the Center for Biological Diversity have advocated the decommission of many of these outdated and heavily corroded oil lines as early as 2018, citing safety concerns and lack of oversight. As these warnings indicate, the volatility of the Elly oil rig is only the tip of the iceberg.

Moreover, the unwillingness of oil owners to upgrade crumbling infrastructure has been aided and abetted by government regulators who, if not entirely ignoring

safety regulations, issue slap-on-the-wrist fines allowing the companies to continue their hazardous operations. In fact, Beta Operating, the local company managing the Elly oil rig where the leak originated, has had a long history of violating federal safety regulations and compliance warnings.

According to data released by the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), Beta Operating has been issued 125 noncompliance violations in total. The fact that this company can continue to operate despite the number of violations shows that the BSEE is not a serious institution that will prevent oil spills or enforce the safety and well-being of the population and the natural habitat.

This comes as no surprise given that former BSEE director, Scott Angelle, appointed to the position by President Donald Trump in 2017, is openly supportive of the big oil conglomerates. Angelle rallied opposition to the 2010 moratorium on deep-water oil drilling put in place by the Obama administration in the aftermath of the BP oil spill.

In a recorded 2017 speech to the Louisiana Gulf Coast Oil Exposition (LAGCOE), Angelle encouraged his audience members to call him on his cell phone rather than text in order to avoid their conversations being disclosed to the public. A year later, the *New York Times* reported that BSEE documents even suggested that Angelle's regulation-cutting policies would help the oil industry save more than \$1.3 billion worth of compliance costs over the next decade.

In the latest oil spill disaster, not only did the corporations fail to maintain operational safety standards but officials failed to notify the public until more than 24 hours after the spill occurred. Residents even spent the day on the beach Saturday as the oil slick crept closer with no knowledge of the spill.

As was reported this week, the Coast Guard acknowledged receiving warnings as early as Friday evening that an oil sheen was visible in the water, but they did not investigate, citing a lack of evidence, limited visibility due to darkness and lack of technology to do so.

It has also been reported that investigators are looking into the possibility that a cargo ship's anchor could have dragged and cut open the oil pipe. Investigators are wondering whether a cargo ship might have been involved as the result of record congestion at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach forcing ships to drop anchor in irregular locations while they wait for a berth.

Andrew Kendrick, pipeline integrity and compliance consultant for Kendrick Consulting LLC, told NBC News that "Anchor strikes are not uncommon" and noted that if true, this would not be the first time that an anchor has hit and damaged an oil pipe, as indicated by a Hazardous Materials Safety Administration survey conducted back in 1992.

The damage caused by the spill was also compounded by pipeline operators who did not shut down their systems for more than three hours when an alert notified them of a potential leak at 2:30 a.m. on Saturday.

Given the available evidence, it is clear that all the warning signs were present, and if the local, state, and federal authorities had taken serious action by implementing and enforcing regulations, then the whole catastrophe would have been avoided.

Reports are now coming in that the environmental impact of this oil spill could have severe implications to marine life for years.

Andrea Bonisoli Alquati, a professor of biological sciences at Cal Poly Pomona who has studied the effects of the 2010 BP oil spill, told NPR that the repercussions are still being seen more than a decade later.

This oil spill comes at a crucial time, when many bird species head south for the winter, raising the possibility that birds will come into contact with contaminated food and water.

"They might not look visibly oiled, but the exposure that they get subtly through their diet or because of physical contact later on might affect their physiology, their health and translate into a lower reproductive success and therefore lower chances of the population

to persist," Alquati explained.

The oil spill has also taken a huge toll on small businesses around the coastline at a time when many small proprietors are still feeling the negative effects of the government's callous and indifferent response to COVID-19.

Like many other natural and man-made disasters handled by capitalist governments around the world, all of the corporate and governmental parties involved were well aware of the tell-tale signs of these impending disasters.

However, they chose to ignore and fight against regulations and practices that could have easily avoided these catastrophes in the first place in order to fill the insatiable need of the wealthy elite to accumulate as much wealth as possible, regardless of the human and environmental cost associated with such action (or inaction).

The profit system and the private ownership of the energy companies have prevented any scientific and ethical approach to these problems. To prevent such catastrophes from happening in the future, energy conglomerates must be expropriated and placed under democratic control by the working class. Otherwise, disasters like that at the Elly oil rig will continue.



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