Amplify Energy indicted for causing massive oil spill off the coast of Southern California last October

Joshua Rodriguez
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On December 15, 2021, Amplify Energy and its two subsidiaries, the Beta Offshore Company and the San Pedro Bay Pipeline, were indicted by a federal grand jury on one misdemeanor count of illegally discharging oil into the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Southern California.

An investigation revealed that the company ignored eight different leak detection alarms over a 13-hour period, shutting off and then restarting the pipeline after each alarm notified them of a potential spill, which caused about 25,000 gallons of crude oil to spill into the ocean on October 1, 2021.

Amplify stated that their response was due to their leak detection system not functioning properly, that it was notifying them of a leak at the platform where no leak was occurring, and that the leak was actually occurring in an undersea pipe four miles away from the platform that their system was unable to detect. A week before the indictment was brought against Amplify, the Beta Offshore Company also compiled a report for federal investigators revealing that its leak detection system was not functioning properly, but declined to provide further details.

According to the actual timeline of events, however, a first alarm went off at 4:10 p.m. on October 1 and was not shut off until 6:00 a.m. the next day, even though Amplify CEO Martyn Willsher commented that the company was not made aware of the oil spill until 8:09 a.m. on October 2. Federal prosecutors also reported in their indictment that even after the eighth and final alarm went off, the oil platform operated for another hour before finally shutting off.

"The fact that they kept hitting the snooze button and ignoring alarms, stopping and starting this pipeline and all the while leaking oil in the Pacific Ocean is reckless and egregious," Bill Caram, director of the Washington based Pipeline Safety Trust, told the Associated Press.

The investigation also showed that the oil rig was understaffed and that the personnel were fatigued from overwork as well as insufficiently trained in their leak detection systems.

More details will doubtless come to light revealing the careless and criminal character of the oil conglomerates, as the indictment and dozens of lawsuits filed against Amplify develop.

As of today, local authorities have declared that clean-up efforts are complete and that Amplify Energy has sent an emergency repair application to the US Army Corps of Engineers, where the company plans to remove and replace 282 feet of damaged pipeline and install concrete mats over the newly-installed pipeline to protect it from future damage.

So far there are no indications whether other oil companies in the region will replace their outdated pipelines or place concrete mats over them.

Since most of the area pipelines and oil refineries attached to them are over 40 years old, this has raised concerns from citizens and environmentalists in the area, especially after the discovery of a new oil sheen found off the coast of Huntington Beach on the same day that the grand jury indictment charges were filed.

Local authorities were unable to verify the presence of the oil sheen until daybreak the next day, saying that it was too dark when the search commenced at 8:00 p.m.

As the pandemic enters its third year, chronic understaffing issues, which were far advanced even prior to 2020, have become even worse as millions contract COVID-19. Many of these workers work in critical industries where a shortage of properly trained and/or overly exhausted employees can have horrific implications.

To cite only a few examples:

· Understaffing at multiple CVS locations across the country have caused workers to fill customer prescriptions with the wrong medications, which was caused by fatigued employees having to work 12-hour shifts due to understaffing.

· Nurses across the country have claimed that higher nursing to patient ratios due to understaffing have led to staff burnout and PTSD, as well as higher chances of patients dying, as has been indicated by a recent National Nurses United survey.

· In September of last year, the World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization released a study showing that working more than 55 hours per week was the largest single contributor to work-related deaths.

These understaffing and overworking issues are rapidly multiplying, even as companies are making billions a year in profits, while Wall Street continues to reach record highs.

The funds are available for oil conglomerates, big and "small," to maintain a full-time, fully-trained staff and to implement an adequately functional leak prevention and detection system, but the pursuit of maximum profits requires that decisions be based not on human need and safety but on profitability, regardless of the impact on workers' lives.

It is this business practice which has caused yet another recent environmental crisis along the Southern California coastline, as it was reported last week that up to 8 million gallons of raw sewage had leaked into the oceans through Long Beach.

The spill originated from the Hyperion Water Reclamation plant, which, much like the outdated oil rigs that surround the Southern California coast, was first built in 1894 and has only been updated and upgraded in the 1950s.

Much of the crucial infrastructure responsible for transporting vital materials is obsolete and is in urgent need of replacement or repair. The conditions that were present in last year's oil spill are present in other key industries across California and the country.