



## Refugio Response Joint Information Center

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE:** July 16, 2015 5:02:26 PM PDT

# SPILL CLEANUP OPERATION REACHES 98 PERCENT, FOUR-COUNTY BEACH SURVEY RESULTS

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The Unified Command directing cleanup operations for the Refugio oil spill reports the effort is 98 percent complete.

The cleanup progress measure is based on assessments of dozens of sites along 96 miles of shoreline. Remaining cleanup work is primarily being done along the shoreline in an area near where oil flowed into the ocean through a storm drain culvert after leaking from a pipeline.

Approximately 300 cleanup workers are currently involved in field operations, with about 25 public agency, commercial, and contractor personnel providing oversight, coordination, and support. Cleanup work is done in phases with assessments made along the way so a precise estimate on how long the remaining cleanup will take is not available.

The spill initially resulted in the closure of several beaches and fisheries. Fisheries were reopened June 29, and the last of the closed beaches, Refugio State Beach, is scheduled to open Friday.

One of the ongoing challenges in the response is determining if tarballs discovered on area beaches are related to oil spilled from the pipeline. The Refugio oil spill happened in an area where natural seeps of crude oil occur and cause tarballs on beaches in the region. A monitoring and sampling protocol has been established and will be carried out for months to come to ensure any recurring pollution from the pipeline oil is properly cleaned up.

Analyses -- conducted by the State of California Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory -- of 44 tarballs collected in a recent two-day beach survey conducted across a four-county area from Santa Barbara County to Orange County identified one sample that was consistent with oil spilled from the pipeline. The matching sample was one of two collected at Las Varas Beach in Santa Barbara County. In accordance with sampling and response plans, a team has been assigned to Las Varas Beach to cleanup the area where the matching sample was found, and the area will continue to be monitored.

During the four-county sampling conducted July 9-10, representatives from the each of the counties, the City of Goleta and several non-governmental organizations including Heal the Bay, Surfrider Foundation, and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper accompanied the sampling teams as the tarballs were collected. All of the [results](#) from the Unified Command approved sampling plan can be found at [www.refugioresponse.com](http://www.refugioresponse.com).

Natural seeps in the area create tarballs throughout the year. Beach goers are encouraged to report unusual concentrations of tarballs to the National Response Center at **1-800-424-8802**.

"I'm proud the local, state, federal, and commercial responders, -- including volunteers and non-governmental organizations -- on this complex and difficult response," said Coast Guard Captain Jennifer Williams, the Federal On-Scene Coordinator for the response. "Although there are standard procedures and techniques, each major response always poses unique challenges and frustrating hurdles. Our team has faced these challenges with dedication, creativity, tenacity and focus. I especially appreciate the understanding, support, and assistance of local agencies and the public," she said.

The spill response Unified Command formed in the wake of the incident is responsible only for spill cleanup related operations. Other matters, such as natural resource damage assessments, investigations, law enforcement, and legal

matters related to the spill are handled by cognizant federal, state and local agencies in accordance with their respective authorities, laws, and regulations.

"For California Department of Fish and Wildlife, cleanup is only the first phase of our response," said Capt. Mark Crossland. "When the cleanup is finished, restoration begins which is critical for the environment and the community. We will be here until that restoration is complete."

While details on environmental impacts and wildlife damages won't be known until further studies and analysis are done, wildlife officials report some nearly 200 birds and more than 100 mammals were found dead in the spill area. Approximately 60 each of birds and mammals were recovered alive and treated by volunteer organizations and wildlife rehabilitation centers.

As the remaining cleanup operations continue, daytime single-lane closures of southbound U.S. Highway 101 west of Refugio State Beach in Goleta, California may still occur and cleanup sites will be off limits to ensure public safety.

## **Background**

May 19, the Plains Pipeline, LLC Line 901 leaked and spilled oil that flowed along a culvert to Refugio State Beach where it reached the Pacific Ocean. Responders established a Unified Command comprised of the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention and Response, Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management, and the responsible party, Plains All American Pipeline. At the height of the response more than 1,400 workers were deployed for field operations and several hundred more were working at the command post and in support roles.

For more information on the Refugio response visit [www.refugioresponse.com](http://www.refugioresponse.com).

For more information contact:

Joint Information Center

(805) 770-3682

[www.refugioresponse.com](http://www.refugioresponse.com)

[reply@refugioresponse.com](mailto:reply@refugioresponse.com)