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Contact: Sam Sacco or Paul Cohen
at 415-989-0536

Oil Spill Exercise in Monterey

San Francisco — Shortly after sunrise on August 8, oil spill prevention and response experts from around the state will be put to the test as they attempt to contain an imaginary spill located just off California's central coast.

In reality, the "spill" will be simulated, resulting from a mock collision between a container ship and tank vessel near Monterey, California. The oil spill exercise will test response to an estimated 125,000 barrels of oil spilling into the Pacific Ocean.

"The key is to mount a quick, effective, and coordinated response between public agencies, industry, environmentalists, and non-profit organizations," says Pete Bontadelli, Administrator of the Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). Bontadelli, one of the drill participants, said, "Exercises like the one taking place in Monterey allow us to gauge our capabilities and, more importantly, teach us how to sharpen out preparedness and response skills in the event of a real incident."

The industry-led exercise is scheduled over a two-day period. The first day will feature presentations and demonstrations addressing wildlife risk analysis and the establishment of a volunteer operations center for oil spill response. Mr. Bontadelli will open the program with an overview detailing state, local, and federal government goals for the drill.

The second day of the drill will feature several panels, comprised of leading industry, environmental, and government experts, discussing how they would work jointly in response to a spill along California's central coast.

"It sounds cliché, but practice truly does make perfect, particularly when preparing for potential oil spills," says Steve Ricks, president of the non-profit Clean Bay, an organization dedicated to controlling and cleaning-up spills. "Oil spill prevention is a top priority for the companies that make up Clean Bay. That's why we invest so much time practicing our response, and so much money on our equipment."

Founded in 1971, Clean Bay is an oil spill response cooperative with 33 members from the petroleum and maritime industries, which is widely viewed as a leading specialist in oil spill response and clean-up. The significant financial and technical resources of its member companies enable Clean Bay to respond to a spill 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with some of the most advanced techniques and equipment available.

"Thanks to a commitment from government, industry, and environmentalists, we are truly better prepared than ever before to handle spills," says Lieutenant Kent Bauer of the U.S. Coast Guard. "Fortunately, we are also seeing a trend toward fewer spills, in the first place."

According to a 1995 report by the American Petroleum Institute, the annual average amount of oil spilled from vessels in U.S. waters has decreased by 5,252,000 (5.25 million) gallons, since

Congress passed the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. From 1984 to 1990, all types of vessels (including tankers, tank barges, freighters, and others) had been spilling an average of six million gallons of oil per year.

"Our first priority is to prevent spills," says Ricks. "And the statistics indicate the industry is doing a good job in that area. But we can never be complacent. That is why it is so critical to conduct these drills, to ensure that we can mount a unified and efficient response in the event of an accident."

The exercise participants are coming from the State, Federal, and local governments, non-profit environmental community, the oil industry, and spill response organizations.

