APPENDIX B:

REQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is the *S.S. MONTEBELLO*?
A: The *S.S. MONTEBELLO* is an oil tanker that was sunk off the coast of California in 1941 by a Japanese submarine during World War II. The vessel is now 900 feet below the water's surface, six miles off the coast of Moonstone Beach in Cambria, California, in federal waters. When the ship left California, its tanks held over 73,571 barrels (3.04 million gallons) of crude oil. It is unknown if this oil still remains on board.

Q: What happened to the *MONTEBELLO*?
A: On December 23, 1941, the *MONTEBELLO* left the Port San Luis bound for Vancouver, Canada, carrying 73,571 barrels of Santa Maria Crude oil. Shortly after leaving port, at 5:40 a.m., a Japanese submarine *I-21* fired a single torpedo into the starboard bow. The vessel went down, but all 38 crew members onboard abandoned ship in four lifeboats and were successfully rescued.

Q: Why is the state of California and the Coast Guard concerned about the *MONTEBELLO*?
A: Because the *MONTEBELLO* may potentially hold more than 70,000 barrels of oil, it poses a serious threat to California's ocean life and shoreline if the oil were released.

Q: What could cause a release of oil from this tanker?
A: Sunken ships may leak oil after being disturbed by heavy storms, when tanks deteriorate, when the sea floor shifts causing the vessel to break apart, if humans disturbed it, etc. This assessment project will help the agencies involved determine what risk if any the *MONTEBELLO* presents.

Q: What happens if the assessment shows the *MONTEBELLO* is a threat?
A: If the *MONTEBELLO* is a pollution threat, the Coast Guard will examine the feasibility of removing the oil.

Q: Is it possible the *MONTEBELLO* is not a threat?
A: The assessment could show that the *MONTEBELLO* is not a threat. It might not be a threat for a variety of reasons: the vessel hull is fully intact and not likely to leak, no oil remains in the tanks, etc. The oil after this many years and at the current depth and temperature may be so thick it simply will not escape even if the vents opened. Through the assessment, experts will determine if there is a risk and how severe it is.

Q: Who is responsible for the clean-up?

A: Because *MONTEBELLO* sank in an act of war, there is no responsible party. When there is no responsible party, the $1 billion federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, established by Congress in 1990, may be used if there is a recognized "substantial pollution threat" associated with the wreck. The federal fund exists to support spill prevention from imminent threats, to augment emergency response assets during an oil spill emergency, and to reimburse states for damages when no responsible party can be identified for a spill. The Coast Guard administers this fund, and through it will fund the assessment and sampling dives in October 2011.

Q: When was the *MONTEBELLO* Assessment Task Force created and why?
A: Senator Sam Blakeslee requested the Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) investigate the threat the *MONTEBELLO* posed to California shores. OSPR agreed to complete an assessment report on the potential threat of the *MONTEBELLO* and gathered a group of stakeholders to conduct the necessary research on the sunken vessel and its cargo. The stakeholders formed the Task Force and met for the first time in early 2009.

Q: Who is participating in the task force?
A: Task force members include:

- U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
- Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Senator Blakeslee's Office
- California Department of Transportation (CalTrans)
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Q: Has the *MONTEBELLO* ever been visited/ researched?
A: Yes. Since its sinking, two underwater submersible expeditions have been conducted to gain a visual exterior inspection of the sunken vessel.

Q: How much would it cost to extract oil from the *MONTEBELLO*?
A: The costs to extract the oil from the *MONTEBELLO,* assuming there is still oil on board, are unknown. In the case of the *S.S JACOB LUCKENBACH*, a sunken vessel that was leaking oil off the coast of Central California in the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, the Coast Guard spent about $20 million to remove oil from the vessel and seal it from future leaks. However, the *MONTEBELLO* sits at a much greater depth and in much colder waters than the *LUCKENBACH*.

Q: Why haven't you evaluated this wreck before?

A: OSPR has been aware of the *MONTEBELLO* for a number of years. In 2003, OSPR participated in developing a report *California High Risk Sunken Vessels*, in which the *MONTEBELLO* was identified as one among several others. In addition, two separate submersible expeditions have been conducted – one in 1996 and another in 2003 – to examine the vessel.

Q: It has been said there may not be oil on board? What does that mean and where would it have gone?
A: Because there is no record of a catastrophic release from the *MONTEBELLO* and all written accounts suggest the tanks holding the oil remained intact, the Task Force proceeded with the assumption that there is still oil on board. It would be prudent however, before investing too much time and money, to first determine if there is still oil in the tanks. It is possible that oil could have escaped over the past 70 years through vents on the ship undetected.

Q: Could you cause a release by disturbing the vessel during your investigation?
A: The Coast Guard contractor (Global Diving and Salvage, Inc.) will be using a new technique for sampling that should seal any boring hole made almost simultaneous with taking a sample. The Task Force looked for techniques with the least likelihood of causing oil release while providing the maximum amount of data possible.

Q: If one of your solutions is to do nothing? What are the consequences of that?
A: If it is determined that the best solution is to leave the vessel undisturbed, a monitoring program would likely be established. This could include regularly conducting overflights of the site, taking satellite images or placing oil detecting sensors near the wreck. The *MONTEBELLO* sits 6 miles off the coast in Federal waters. If oil should leak from the *MONTEBELLO*, the Coast Guard and OSPR would join in a Unified Command to respond. The Area Contingency Plan will guide any response for that location. In addition, there are oil spill response organizations (OSROs) on-call 24 hours a day to respond to a catastrophic oil spill if one should occur.

Q: What does a worst-case scenario look like?
A: It is difficult to identify a "worst-case scenario" at this time without updated information as to the condition of the ship as well as how much oil is on board. The Coast Guard's assessment dive focuses upon data collection to determine if the vessel is at risk for leaking oil which will be folded into recommended possible courses of action in a report due out late 2011. The most likely scenario would be one of smaller releases over a longer period of time, but without a thorough site assessment, the full risk is difficult to determine.

Q: When will the report be done?

A: The report is slated to be out by late 2011.

Q: What will the report include?
A: The report will include the following:

- Vessel and site assessment considerations
- Available technologies
- Potential environmental and economic impacts from an oil release
- Funding options
- Public/private partners

Q: Who is responsible for paying for this study, oil removal, monitoring, etc?
A: OSPR provided initial funding to launch the initial assessment, but the Coast Guard has made a commitment to the full assessment and will fund those activities through the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. The report on the assessment will present the findings on the level of threat posed which will direct possible funding source in the future.

Q: Can the oil be used once it is removed? How much is it worth?
A: Oil collected from oil spills can be recycled. It is unknown whether or not this oil would be suitable for use after being extracted.

Q: What other examples are there of sunken vessels releasing oil years later?
A: In 1953 the freighter *S.S. JACOB LUCKENBACH* collided with another vessel and sank off the coast of central California in the waters that today are part of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary. As the ship decayed on the ocean floor, it leaked oil and became the source of many oil spills, killing thousands of seabirds. The source of the oil was unknown until 2002 when these "mystery spills" were linked by the OSPR Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory to the *LUCKENBACH*. At the time the *LUCKENBACH's* releases were discovered, the owners of the vessel no longer existed. The Coast Guard used the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund and spent about $20 million to remove approximately 100,000 gallons of oil from the vessel and seal it from future leaks.