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Santa Barbara County official rejects plan to move crude oil by truck

By Javier Panzar

Exxon Mobil proposal to move crude oil by truck from Santa Barbara County is rejected

Santa Barbara County official has rejected a proposal by Exxon Mobil to send a fleet of 6,720-gallon trucks on as many as 192 daily trips on U.S. 101 while the pipeline the company normally uses is out of commission after last month's oil spill.

With boats offshore, cleanup efforts continue at Refugio State Beach on Thursday morning June 4, 2015.

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State Atty. Gen. and U.S. Senate candidate Kamala Harris, center, is briefed by Tyson Butzke, right, a superintendent with California State Parks, and Tom Cullen, left, of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, at Refugio State Beach on Thursday.



Oil spill cleanup continues at Refugio State Beach on Sunday.
(Christina House / For The Times)

Dianne Black, assistant director of planning and development for Santa Barbara County, shot down the plan to use as many as eight trucks per hour, 24 hours a day, to transport oil from an Exxon facility near El Capitan State Beach to refineries as far away as San Luis Obispo County.

Crude oil typically moves from Exxon Mobil's three offshore platforms through a 10.6-mile pipeline owned by Plains All American Pipeline. That pipeline ruptured May 19 and spilled as many as 101,000 gallons of crude oil along the Gaviota coast.

Since then, Exxon has reduced its daily oil production by nearly two-thirds and stored its crude in tanks at its Santa Ynez Unit in Las Flores Canyon near U.S. 101.

The production of crude oil and natural gas would halt once storage space ran out, Exxon claimed in its application for an expedited “emergency” permit.

The company argued that ceasing production would potentially jeopardize essential public services by cutting off the company’s deliveries to Southern California Gas Co.

Black said Tuesday that there was no evidence that the large gas network run by Southern California Gas would be unable to serve customers without natural gas from the Exxon facility.

In her rejection, Black noted that the evidence presented by Exxon “does not support a finding that an emergency exists.”

The company cannot appeal the decision and would have to apply for a non-emergency permit. That process would take months, requiring environmental review and public hearings, Black said.

An Exxon spokesman said the company is disappointed and is still in the process of reviewing the decision.

“We will be exploring our options going forward,” spokesman Richard Keil said.

Santa Barbara County has phased out truck transportation of oil since the 1970s in favor of using pipelines, which are considered a safer option.

“We applaud county officials for protecting the people and environment of Santa Barbara from this absurd and dangerous proposal.”



Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times

A "Beach Closed" sign is posted at Coal Oil Point in Isla Vista. Many state beaches have been closed in the area, but some people still made their way to the shore.

said Kristen Monsell, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The fleet of trucks would have exported the crude to an asphalt refinery in Santa Maria and an oil refinery 71 miles away in San Luis Obispo County, among other destinations.

Environmental activists and many residents had opposed using the tanker trucks on local roads, calling it unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

A group of about 30 protesters gathered Monday afternoon near the county’s administrative building to voice disapproval with the trucking proposal. The county received more than 200 pages of emails from residents on the subject, with most locals urging Black to deny the application.

“Santa Barbara has suffered enough devastation from this oil spill. We are relieved we won’t have to worry about trucks flooding our highways,” said Rebecca Claassen, an organizer with the activist group Food and Water Watch.