

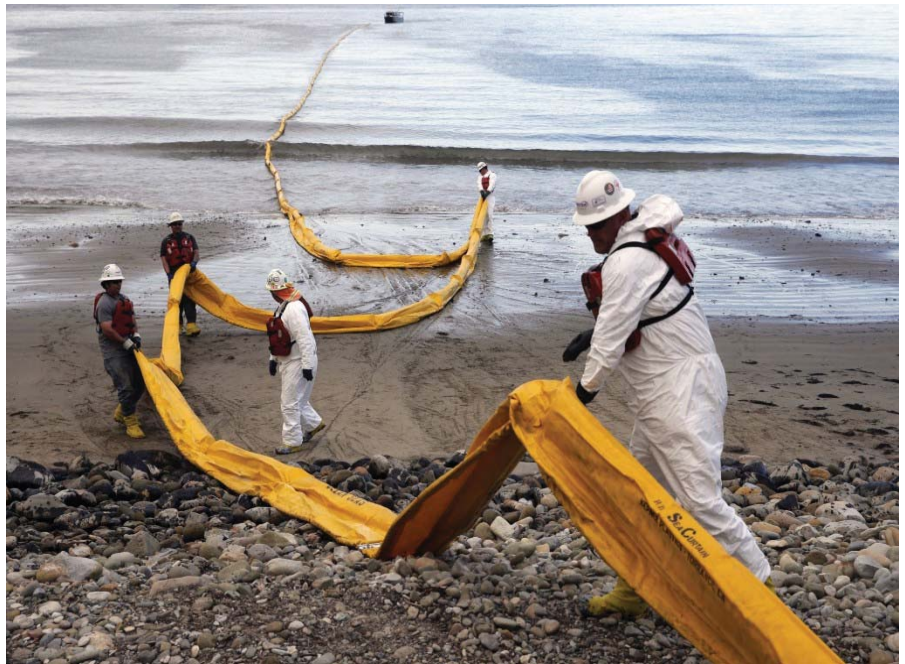
## Oil Company To Face Felony Charges Over Massive California Spill

by Samantha Page  
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The company responsible for spilling 140,000 gallons of oil on the Pacific coastline near Santa Barbara, California, has been indicted on 46 charges, including four felony charges. One employee of Plains All American Pipeline was also indicted.

The company faces up to \$2.8 million in fines plus additional costs and penalties, which would be split between the state and Santa Barbara County. The employee, 41-year-old environmental and regulatory compliance specialist James Buchanan, faces up to three years in jail.

“Crimes against our environment must be met with swift action and accountability,” California Attorney General Kamala Harris said in a statement. “This conduct is criminal and today’s charges serve as a powerful reminder of the consequences that flow from jeopardizing the well-being of our ecosystems and public health.”



In this May 21, 2015, file photo, workers prepare an oil containment boom at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., two days after a ruptured pipeline created the largest coastal oil spill in California in 25 years.

The charges come after months of grand jury testimony following the spill last May after a pipeline running along the California coastline ruptured. The spill led to the temporary closure of fisheries and two beaches, as well as the death of some local wildlife.

The investigation found that the pipeline had corroded to 1/16th of an inch before the rupture occurred, but there are also several charges relating to Plains All-American’s failure to properly notify local and state officials about the leak.

Environmentalists applauded Tuesday's indictment, saying that it should serve as a warning to other industry operators.

"Let's hope it prompts the entire oil industry to take a hard look at the legal risks and enormous environmental dangers of operating pipelines and offshore platforms in one of the world's most beautiful and fragile coastal environments," Kristen Monsell, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

Plains All American Pipeline, for its part, "believes that neither the company nor any of its employees engaged in any criminal behavior at any time in connection with this accident, and that criminal charges are unwarranted." The company said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend ourselves against these charges and are confident we will demonstrate that the charges have no merit and represent an inappropriate attempt to criminalize an unfortunate accident."

Perhaps ironically, the indictment was handed down on the same week that another oil company, Shell, leaked 90,000 gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. There is no word yet on whether that incident will lead to a criminal investigation.

When BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in 2010, killing 11 people and causing the biggest offshore oil spill in U.S. history, the company was charged with manslaughter and gross negligence. BP was eventually ordered to pay \$20 billion in fines and damages.