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[The California Report](#)

State Agency Hopeful Chevron's Massive Kern County Spill Is Finally Over

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Site of Chevron crude petroleum release near Kern County town of McKittrick, July 15, 2019. Pickup truck near top of image shows scale of spill area. (California Department of Conservation)

State regulators say they're cautiously optimistic that a major release of crude oil from a Chevron well in Kern County — an episode that has continued for three months — is finally over.

Chevron told state officials Wednesday that more than [1.3 million gallons of oil and water](#) have flowed to the surface in the Cymric oil field, 35 miles west of Bakersfield, since May 10. An estimated one-third of that, or 445,130 gallons, is believed to be crude petroleum.

The [spill](#), which Chevron and the state's Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) describe as a "surface expression," has led to a major cleanup operation near the town of McKittrick.

A DOGGR engineering team at the release site says all of the vents associated with the incident "became inactive" late last week, according to Don Drysdale, a spokesman for the state Department of Conservation.

"We're hopeful that the surface expression has ceased but mindful that we need to continue monitoring the situation and looking into the causes of this unusual incident," Drysdale said Wednesday.

Eric Laughlin, a representative for the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, expressed caution about the situation because the flow has previously stopped and started several times.

"We are still monitoring the site as cleanup operations continue," he said, adding that the last flow was last Friday, Aug. 2.

State officials say a civil engineer deemed a portion of the site safe last week, so contractors could begin hauling away contaminated soil from the 1-acre spill site.

A second section of the site has not yet been declared safe, Laughlin said.

Chevron had hired two Bakersfield contractors to work on the cleanup job, Advanced Industrial Services and Sturgeon Services, according to Morgan Crinklaw, a spokesman for the oil company.

State regulators recently brought in nine [experts](#) from the Sandia, Lawrence Berkeley and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories to help evaluate the causes of the protracted release.

Chevron has said the [probable cause](#) was related to its efforts to seal off a damaged and abandoned oil well. The firm says its attempts to confirm the source of the original leak and shut it down unleashed even higher flows in the weeks after the initial problem was discovered.

DOGGR has issued two notices of violation to Chevron and ordered the oil company to "take all measures" to stop the flow and prevent a recurrence of the releases. Chevron is appealing the state's order, which it says lacks specifics.

"Despite the appeal, Chevron continues to do work required in the order to ensure the seepage ceases and clean up the surface expression," Drysdale said.

The spill has added fuel to arguments by environmental groups who want California to shift more aggressively away from oil and gas and believe state regulators are too soft on the industry.

"It's shocking that it's taken this long for the company and state officials to stop this dangerous pollution," said Clare Lakewood, a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, in an emailed statement Wednesday.

The incident is also expected to be the focus of legislative [hearings](#). The chairs of the state Senate and Assembly committees overseeing much of California's oil industry say they plan to scrutinize the cause and response to the spill.