

California oil spill harder to clean up in choppy waters

May 23 2015, by Brian Melley



Staff members and volunteers work to clean oil off a brown pelican at the International Bird Rescue office in the San Pedro area of Los Angeles, on Friday, May 22, 2015. A broken onshore pipeline in near Santa Barbara, Calif., spewed oil down a storm drain and into the ocean for several hours Tuesday before it was shut off. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson)

A 10-square-mile oil slick off the California coast is thinner than a coat of paint and it's becoming harder to skim from choppy waters, officials said as more dead animals were discovered.

The combination of sunlight and waves Friday helped evaporate and dissolve some of the oil that blackened beaches and covered wildlife in thick goo after a pipeline on shore leaked up to 105,000 gallons on the Santa Barbara coast Tuesday.

Federal regulators ordered Plains All American Pipeline to drain the pipe that leaked, test the metal in the damaged section of pipe, and complete a series of steps before it can ask to resume pumping oil through the pipe to inland refineries.

"Before restarting operations, we're going to make sure they do things right," said Linda Daugherty of the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

Investigators with the agency are looking into the cause of the spill and whether there was something Plains should have known about conditions in the underground pipeline and factors that could have contributed to the accident.

The spill is also being investigated by federal, state and local prosecutors for possible violations of state and federal law.

The pipeline safety agency's corrective action order said the 10.6-mile line had recently been inspected, but the results weren't known. Tests of the 2-foot-diameter pipe in 2012 found 41 anomalies mostly due to external corrosion, frequently near welds, the agency said.

The company has said there were no previous problems with the pipe.



Staff members and volunteers work to clean oil off a brown pelican at the International Bird Rescue office in the San Pedro area of Los Angeles, on Friday, May 22, 2015. A broken onshore pipeline in Santa Barbara, Calif., spewed oil down a storm drain and into the ocean for several hours on Tuesday before it was shut off. The early toll on wildlife included five oil-covered pelicans, which were taken in to be cleaned, officials said. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson)

Plains said it could take weeks or even months before investigators find what caused the disaster.

There's no estimate to how much damage the spill caused, but a dead dolphin was found in Santa Barbara Harbor and three dead pelicans were recovered.

It's not clear if the dolphin found in the harbor, about 20 miles from the source of the spill, died from exposure to oil, said Veterinarian Michael

Ziccardi.

Two sea lions, an elephant seal and six pelicans have been rescued, said Ziccardi, director of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network.

Workers wearing yellow protective suits, rubber gloves and face masks scrubbed pelicans with toothbrushes in a soapy bath at the International Bird Rescue in the San Pedro section of Los Angeles.

"Our goal is to get these birds stabilized, to get them warm, hydrated, comfortable and get them washed as soon as possible and then rehabilitated so they can go back home," Christine Fiorello with the Oiled Wildlife Care Network said in a video interview with The Associated Press.



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Friday, May 22, 2015. A broken onshore pipeline in Santa Barbara, Calif., spewed oil down a storm drain and into the ocean for several hours Tuesday before it was shut off. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson)

The disaster, which led officials to close Refugio and El Capitan state beaches just before Memorial Day weekend, was sure to make more campers unhappy as the state announced the popular parks and campgrounds would be closed until June 4, longer than originally announced.

Rough seas have made recovery efforts more difficult, and the light sheen of oil was becoming harder to skim off the surface, said Rick McMichael, a Plains representative.

Plains All American and its subsidiaries operate 17,800 miles of crude oil and natural gas pipelines across the country, according to federal regulators.



Signs marking beach closed to fishing and harvesting are seen while cleanup crews in the background shovel and rake contaminated sand into bags at El Capitan State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Friday, May 22, 2015. Officials say the sheen of oil is now thinner than a coat of paint and is becoming harder to skim from choppy, wind-driven waters. A state parks official says Refugio and El Capitan state beaches and campgrounds will be closed until June 4. That's a week longer than originally announced. The spill from the May 19 break now covers nearly 10 square miles.(AP Photo/Michael A. Mariant)

Since 2006, four subsidiaries of Plains All American have reported at least 223 accidents along their lines and been subject to 25 enforcement actions by federal regulators.

The accidents resulted in a combined 864,300 gallons of hazardous liquids spilled and damages topping \$32 million. Corrosion was determined to be the cause in more than 70 of those accidents. Failures in materials, welds and other equipment were cited more than 80 times.

The company has defended its record, saying accidental releases have decreased as the number of miles of pipelines has increased. It said it spent more than \$1.3 billion since 2007 on maintenance, repair and enhancement of its equipment.



David Ledig, a national monument manager from the Bureau of Land Management, takes pictures of rocks covered in oil at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A bird covered in oil flaps its wings at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A worker removes oil from the beach at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



California mussels and a crab are covered in oil at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Plastic buckets filled with oil collected from the beach at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Clean up workers gather oil-contaminated sand bags at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the oil escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A clean-up worker removes oil from the beach at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Plastic buckets with oil collected from the beach are placed at the side at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Thursday, May 21, 2015. More than 7,700 gallons of oil has been raked, skimmed and vacuumed from a spill that stretched across 9 miles of California coast, just a fraction of the sticky, stinking goo that escaped from a broken pipeline, officials said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A cleanup crew worker rakes oil-contaminated seaweed into piles at El Capitan State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Friday, May 22, 2015. Officials say the sheen of oil is now thinner than a coat of paint and is becoming harder to skim from choppy, wind-driven waters. A state parks official says Refugio and El Capitan state beaches and campgrounds will be closed until June 4. That's a week longer than originally announced. The spill from the May 19 break now covers nearly 10 square miles. (AP Photo/Michael A. Mariant)



A pelican is seen floating in the water near an oil-contaminated patch of seaweed at Refugio State Beach, north of Goleta, Calif., Friday, May 22, 2015. Officials say the sheen of oil is now thinner than a coat of paint and is becoming harder to skim from choppy, wind-driven waters. A state parks official says Refugio and El Capitan state beaches and campgrounds will be closed until June 4. That's a week longer than originally announced. The spill from the May 19 break now covers nearly 10 square miles. (AP Photo/Michael A. Mariant)

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