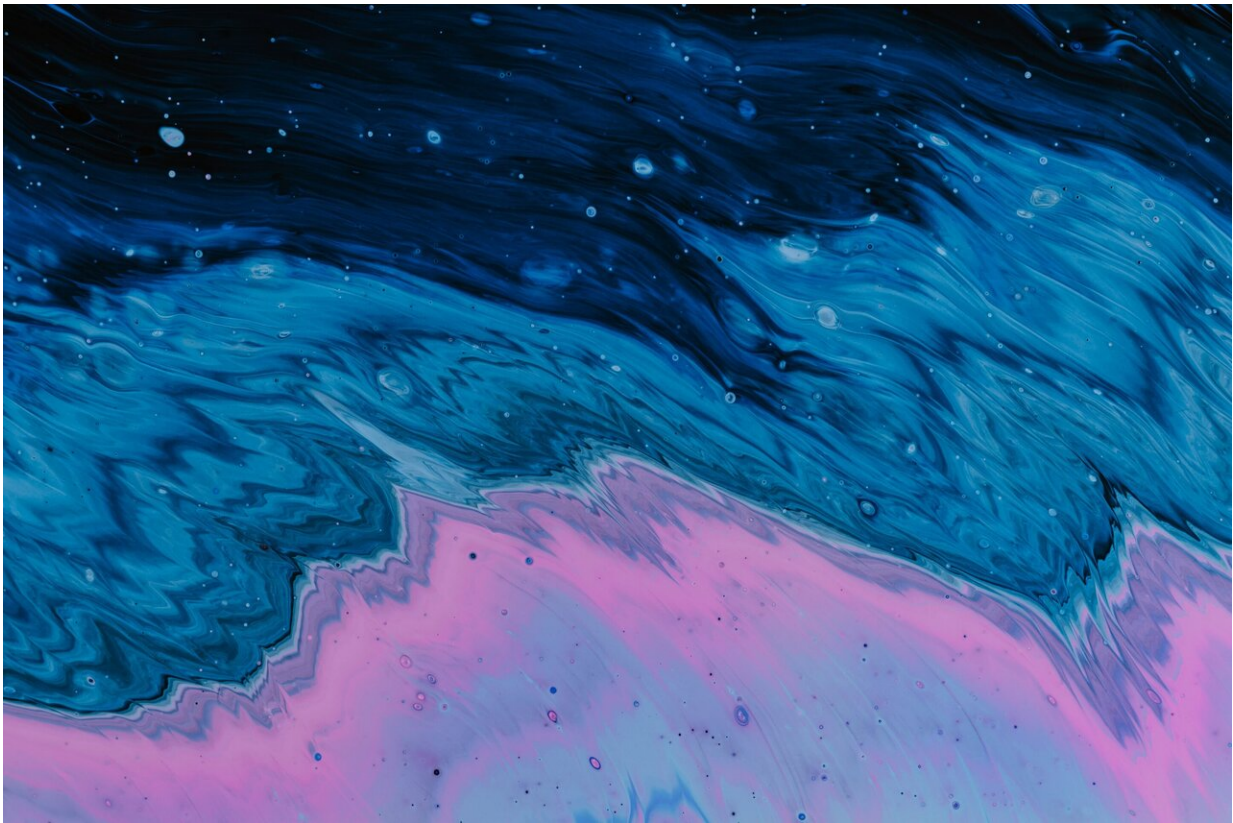


# From the sky, Coast Guard monitors movement of California oil spill

October 6 2021, by Ruben Vives, Los Angeles Times

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

It was nearly 2 p.m. Tuesday when the Alenia C-27J Spartan, a U.S. Coast Guard aircraft, began its flight along the Orange County coast.

In the back of the plane with the cargo door open, two flight mechanics looked for oil sheens on the dark teal ocean while reporters on board watched.

Since Saturday, when the spill from the Amplify Energy underwater [oil pipeline](#) was reported, the fixed-wing aircraft has flown daily, relaying information about the size and direction of the oil spill to a command center and to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, according to Coast Guard Petty Officer Steve Strohmaier.

"It's one of the many assets that the Coast Guard has to assist our local partners to help mitigate environmental disasters," he said.

Major oil spills are often visible to the eye. The layers of oil on the surface of water vary in thickness, size and color from dull brown to silver.

But on Tuesday's flight, the ocean looked ordinary, with the exception of oil on the beaches.

Private pilot Bryan Keith also reported not seeing much while flying over the oil spill this past weekend.

The 48-year-old was at home in Los Angeles, reading about the disaster, when he decided to look for aerial footage.

He was unable to find anything, so he flew over the disaster area with a friend, hoping to upload some video on his aviation-themed YouTube channel, Wolficorn.

"We really didn't see a lot of oil in the water," he said. "We saw some oil on the sand and some oil sheen."

"I was a little perplexed by it," he added.

But later in the day, as he reviewed the footage he had taken, he spotted a large area of oil along the coastline.

"It was a frightening realization," he said. "It was bad, and the oil was doing considerable damage."

He said glare from the sun may have prevented him from seeing the oil at times.

"In retrospect, it makes sense—when the sun hits the water, it polarizes the light," he said. "Depending on the angle, you're going to see different things."

On Monday afternoon, oil spill monitoring and cleanup operations were hampered when a storm system moved over the region, producing rain, thunder and lightning. Gusty winds created higher seas, moving the oil.

It is not clear what caused the damage to the pipeline, which allowed tens of thousands of gallons of crude to [spill](#) into the waters off Orange County.

Investigators have said they are looking into whether a ship's anchor caused the pipe breach, but officials did not provide more information about that probe on Tuesday. Divers and remote vehicle footage have confirmed that the pipeline is no longer leaking, officials said.

Strohmaier said the Coast Guard plane monitoring the oil's movement is equipped with infrared equipment to help flight crews track it. The plane, he said, was designed to be used for various missions, including search and rescue, transporting resources to disaster zones and surveying [oil spills](#).

On Tuesday, with the storms gone, the 74-foot plane flew over Huntington Beach, Newport Beach and Laguna Beach.

From the high vantage point, all that was visible to those on the plane were cargo ships, swaths of expensive real estate, kelp and crashing waves.

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