

The Tide Continues to Turn Against Exxon Oil Trucking Plan



Exxon's offshore platforms and onshore processing facilities shut down when the Plains All American Pipeline ruptured onto Refugio State Beach in 2015 and have not reopened. Now, in the midst of a pandemic and an oil glut, Exxon is seeking a permit to allow up to 70 oil tankers a day to truck oil from its Goleta facility to the Phillips 66 Santa Maria Refinery, and then across the Twitchell Reservoir and the length of the Santa Maria watershed to the San Joaquin Valley on Highway 166, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Those plans have now taken the form of a permit application and a final Environmental Impact Report, which the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission was going to consider at public hearings on Sept. 2nd and 9th until the recent announcement by Phillips 66 that it will close the Santa Maria facility and switch to processing renewable fuels threw a large monkey wrench into that part of the plan.

The report concludes that the project would inflict significant, unavoidable impacts on wildlife and cultural resources in the event of an oil spill from a tanker truck.

But the most notable aspect of the report is what it doesn't say: The crank-up-the-dormant-offshore-oil-rigs part of the plan is omitted. If you want to present planners with a version of your project that contains a reduced number of environmental impacts, not mentioning them is certainly one way to go.

But it's not a good way. "The county's Final Environmental Impact Report fails to disclose the devastating impacts that will result if ExxonMobil is allowed to resume oil drilling in the Santa Barbara Channel and truck oil along our scenic highways," said Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center, which represents Get Oil Out! and Santa Barbara County Action Network. "ExxonMobil's proposal will result in more oil spills, air pollution, and increased climate change at a time when we need to pursue clean energy alternatives."

The year before the Refugio spill shut it down, Exxon's Las Flores Canyon facility was the biggest emitter in Santa Barbara County, accounting for 281,616 metric tons of greenhouse gas,

59.4 tons of volatile organic compounds, and 38.9 tons of PM2.5 -- particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in size. Harvard researchers have now found that ["A small increase in long-term exposure to PM2.5 leads to a large increase in the COVID-19 death rate."](#)

Residents, businesses, and local governments in SLO County need to impress all of the above upon Santa Barbara County, the project's sole permitting authority, ASAP. It's the only way we're going to get a say.

Morro Bay and the City of SLO were the first to do so. In Santa Barbara County, Goleta and [the City of Santa Barbara](#) have done likewise. So have the Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation, 350 Santa Barbara, Center for Biological Diversity, Environmental Defense Center, Food and Water Action, GOO!, SBCAN, Sierra Club, UCSB Academic Senator Esmeralda Quintero-Cubillan, and Surfrider Foundation - Santa Barbara County Chapter.

With the pending closure of the Santa Maria Refinery, the Exxon project is down, but not out. The County Planning Commission will come back to the issue in November.

In the meantime, all SLO County residents need to call in to the virtual meetings of the city councils that have not yet gone on record opposing Exxon's plan to tell the council why [this project is a bad idea](#) and ask them to send Santa Barbara County a letter of opposition to the Exxon oil trucking project ASAP.

Burning the 4 million barrels of oil intended to be trucked every year would result in over 1.7 million metric tons of carbon pollution -- the same amount as burning nearly 2 billion pounds of coal. A recent scientific study confirmed that every barrel of California oil left in the ground will result in a net decrease of about half a barrel of oil consumption globally.

Ask your city council to join with the cities of San Luis Obispo, Morro Bay, Goleta and Santa Barbara, as well as UAW2865, Environmental Justice Alliance, Sweetwater Collaborative, Mercury Press International, Quail Springs Permaculture, Sunburst Sanctuary, Gaviota Coast Conservancy and the Cuyama Valley Community Association: Let the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors know that they are opposed to Exxon/Mobil's plan to truck offshore oil along San Luis Obispo highways.

Here's a handy resolution template they can use:

WHEREAS, the city of _____ values our state's ocean and coastal waters, which provide habitat to a vast array of wildlife, including fish, whales, sea turtles, and birds that depend on a healthy and clean environment; and

WHEREAS, city's residents and its visitors enjoy our beaches and the Pacific Ocean for recreational, commercial, and educational activities, all of which support our local economy; and

WHEREAS, the extremely high rate of accidents makes trucking one of the worst forms of oil transport; and

WHEREAS, oil truck accidents cause fires and explosions, injure and kill people, and spill hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude a year onto roads and into waterways; and

WHEREAS, both the trucking and pipeline routes would pass through critical habitat for several species protected as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA, including red-legged frogs, California tiger salamanders and Southern California steelhead, which are highly susceptible to toxic crude oil; and

WHEREAS, these proposals would bring aging offshore drilling platforms back to life, which is inconsistent with city's and California's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and phase out oil and gas extraction; and

WHEREAS, offshore drilling threatens our coast, public health, and marine life, including endangered whales, sea turtles and sea otters; and

WHEREAS, offshore fracking threatens the Santa Barbara Channel with toxic chemical discharges, and approving these proposals will increase the incentives to frack; and

WHEREAS, a recent scientific study confirmed that every barrel of California oil left in the ground will result in a net decrease of about half a barrel of oil consumption globally;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the city of [REDACTED] opposes Santa Barbara County Planning Commission Project Case # 17RVP-00000-00081, an application to truck offshore oil along Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Kern County highways.