COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: John Baker, Deputy CEO & Director of Planning and Development

DATE: January 8, 2009

RE: Summary of December 7, 2008, offshore oil spill from Platform A

Platform A, located in federal waters offshore Carpinteria, spilled an estimated 34.6 barrels of oil emulsion into the ocean. This spill occurred sometime in the early morning hours of December 7, 2008, likely sometime between 4:00 and 7:00 a.m. The summary provided below was compiled from information provided by the Minerals Management Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, Office of Spill Prevention and Response. Additional information will be provided at the Board's January 13th hearing.
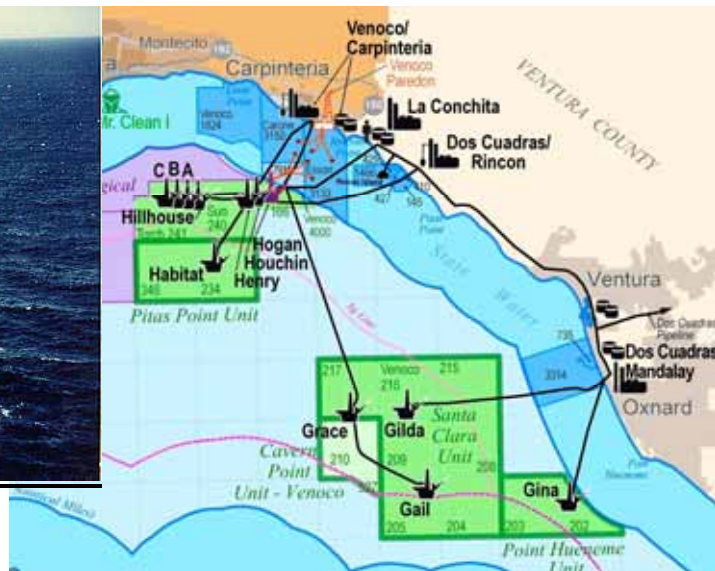

Figure 1: Platform A looks similar to adjacent Platform B, pictured above

Source and Cause of Spill: The oil emulsion was released from a hole, approximately ¾ inch in diameter, in a shipping pump can (pictured below). Initial analysis indicates the can was corroded and the operator's maintenance program failed to detect and replace the can before the corrosion resulted in an oil emulsion spill. This type of platform design, that is one that employs cans such as these shown below, is antiquated, and exists only on five platforms in offshore

Santa Barbara County: Platforms A, B, C, Gilda, and Irene. As shown below, the cans hang over the sides of the platform in a manner that provides no opportunity for containment of spills on the platform.

Figure 2: Some of the Shipping Pump Cans on Platform A, including the One that Spilled Oil on 12-07-08

Spill Detection: According to the Minerals Management Service inspector on scene afterwards, a crew boat in the area contacted the platform operator and reported that it spotted oil in the ocean, coming from Platform A. The platform operators inspected the platform and discovered the hole in No. 4 shipping pump can at 7:01 a.m. on December 7, 2008.

Initial Response to Stop Spill: Upon discovery of the spill, the operator shutdown the platform, plugged the leak, and coated the can's surface with Splash zone. DCOR then took the leaking shipping pump can out of service, flushing and sealing it, and shifting oil to another shipping pump can in better condition. DCOR reportedly notified regulators an hour after discovering the spill.

Subsequent Response to Contain Spill in Ocean:

An oil slick estimated to be one mile long by 2,000 feet wide was reported the morning following the spill, heading due east from the platform towards Ventura County. Seas and winds were relatively calm, allowing a relatively successful spill response. Ultimately, an estimated 19.16 barrels of oil were recovered by response vessels. Several vessels were involved in the response, including Clean Seas vessels designed and operated for oil spill containment and recovery, Fishermen's Offshore Response Team vessels, whose crews are trained to assist in containment of spills, a Coast Guard vessel, and a vessel employed by DCOR.

Known Damage to Marine Resources: Three live, oiled birds and one dead, oiled bird were recovered. Of the three live, oiled birds, one subsequently died and two were rehabilitated at the Oiled Wildlife Care Facility in San Pedro and later released into the wild. Other oiled seabirds were observed in the area (number unknown), but were not recovered for treatment. No other damages have been reported to date; the spill did not reach or impact land.

Follow Up Corrective Measures: The Minerals Management Service (MMS) reports that DCOR inspected and conducted pressure tests on all shipping pump cans. DCOR plans to eventually take all the cans out of service on Platforms A, B, and C very soon, and the MMS has also inquired with PXP about similar action for Platform Irene. MMS did issue two incidents of non-compliance to DCOR as a result of the spill, and expects DCOR to convert to a different system very soon. MMS has also approached PXP to discuss future service of shipping pump cans on Platform Irene.