



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** November 16, 2021

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

#### **SUBJECT**

**TOWARD CLEANER WATERS: SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO PHASE OUT OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

On October 1, 2021, tens of thousands of gallons of oil were spilled out of the Amplify offshore oil pipeline off the coast of Huntington Beach, California. We believe this disaster was completely preventable, and today's board letter seeks to implement strategies to ensure that oil spills never again threaten our coasts and communities.

There have been six major oil spills off the coast of California over the past fifty years, polluting miles and miles of beaches, causing untold damage to our coastal ecology and beach economies.<sup>1</sup> We know the risks associated with offshore oil drilling, and yet we continue to allow and heavily subsidize drilling off our iconic coastline. While the Amplify oil spill was not as devastating as it potentially could have been, every time there is an oil spill we are confronted with economic, public health, and environmental challenges. As long as offshore drilling is allowed, we are always faced with the possibility that the next time will be much, much worse.

The County of San Diego and our Office of Emergency Services were able to mobilize a quick response to the Amplify oil spill, but we should never have needed to allocate those public

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/oilspills.html>

#### **Oil Spills in California:**

1969: Union Oil Drilling Platform Spill, Santa Barbara, 4.2 million gallons of crude oil  
1971: San Francisco Bay Oil Spill, San Francisco, 800,000 gallons of crude oil  
1990: American Trader Oil Spill, Huntington Beach, 416,000 gallons of crude oil  
2007: Cosco Busan San Francisco Bay Oil Spill, San Francisco, 58,000 gallons of crude oil  
2015: Refugio Pipeline Oil Spill: Santa Barbra, 100,000 gallons of crude oil  
2021: Amplify Oil Platform Spill, Orange County, at least 126,000 gallons of crude oil

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resources. The Amplify spill was a clear signal that we cannot continue to drill for oil off the coasts of California.

It was fortuitous that earlier this year Representative Mike Levin introduced H.R. 3053, the “American Coasts and Ocean Protection Act,” to stop new offshore oil drilling within federal waters of the United States. While we included support for this legislation under the County of San Diego’s Legislative Program and have previously communicated our support for this bill, the County’s support for this deserves to be emphasized through a Board of Supervisors-adopted resolution.

Furthermore, the impacts from the Amplify oil spill will likely continue to reverberate along the San Diego coasts for years to come. The County should also advocate for continued monitoring and testing of our waters to better understand the impacts of the oil spill. Our Department of Environmental Health and Quality monitors bacteria in our coastal waters, consistent with California law pertaining to Safe Recreational Water Use (California Health and Safety Code Sections 115875-115915). No agency is conducting ongoing monitoring linked to offshore drilling. Today’s board letter will also add to our legislative program additional efforts to monitor petroleum-based pollutants along our coastlines.

Today’s action recommends the adoption of the resolution in support of the “American Coasts and Oceans Protection Act” and add support for petroleum-based monitoring to the County’s legislative program.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER AND SUPERVISOR LAWSON-REMER**

1. Adopt the Resolution A, **A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO IN SUPPORT OF THE AMERICAN COASTS AND OCEANS PROTECTION ACT.**
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to add to the County of San Diego’s legislative program support for legislation and/or administrative action that provide for petroleum-based monitoring of offshore oil drilling.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The negative impacts of offshore oil drilling disproportionately impact vulnerable, low-income communities. From dependence on fisheries and tourism economies impacted by oil spills, to climate change-induced wildfires, flooding, and heatwaves, these impacts are more acute for those communities with limited resources. Supporting efforts to phase out offshore oil drilling will help lessen these impacts on vulnerable communities.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

Oil spills have a devastating impact on our state economy and a prohibition on new offshore oil drilling will help our coastal economy.

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## **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

### **BACKGROUND**

California's history has been inextricably linked with oil. The first significant discovery of oil in west-central Los Angeles occurred in 1874.<sup>2</sup> Since then, in-state production of oil has boomed along with offshore oil production, centered around the Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and Orange County coasts. Although there has never been offshore oil drilling along the coast of San Diego County, the Amplified oil spill has shown just how vulnerable our region is to the impacts of oil spills. Oil spills have a devastating impact on our regional economy, public health, environmental justice, and ecosystems.

**Economic impacts** - In both Orange and San Diego Counties, the ocean economy accounts for roughly \$7.7 billion in economic activity and sustains more than 140,000 jobs in tourism and recreation. This oil spill has fouled beaches and closed fisheries throughout Orange and San Diego Counties, causing harm to coastal tourism and the marine economy. We may be incurring economic costs from this oil spill for years to come.

The Board of Supervisors has supported the revitalization of the local tuna and fishing industry, which provide economic opportunities and fresh, healthy food to residents of the County. Oil spills not only endanger this emerging industry, but also may deprive our communities of concern of healthy food options.

**Public health impacts** - There are numerous public health impacts associated with offshore oil spills, many of which are incurred among clean-up staff, fishers, and the public at large. There are both short-term impacts, including eye and skin irritation, and respiratory illness. Anxiety and post-traumatic stress is also found to be common among oil spill clean-up crews. Oil may contain carcinogens,<sup>3</sup> and long-term epidemiological studies have indicated potential increased rates of cancer.<sup>4</sup> These public health impacts also include long-term changes to ecosystems, food systems, livelihoods, and other psychosocial effects.<sup>5</sup>

**Environmental justice impacts** - Oil spills also present environmental justice impacts to communities that are often already vulnerable and lack access to resources. Vulnerable populations are often involved in cleanup efforts, and can be provided inadequate protective equipment to protect public health. Additionally, communities of concern may not be granted compensation proportionate to the socioeconomic impacts they suffer.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24807982>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/emergency-response/types-oil>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tos.org/oceanography/article/human-health-and-socioeconomic-effects-of-the-deepwater-horizon-oil-spill-in-the-gulf-of-mexico-1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/oilspillresponse/protecting/appendixa.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1419&context=faculty\\_articles](https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1419&context=faculty_articles)

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**Habitat impacts** - Oil in the water can be deadly for animals.<sup>7</sup> Oil is toxic when ingested. When birds get oil on their feathers, it impairs the waterproofing that is necessary to keep a bird warm. A bird may also lose its ability to float in the water or to fly if it is covered in oil. Oil-fouled marine mammals may suffer from hypothermia. Oil may cause reproductive problems and genetic abnormalities in fish. Contaminants may enter the food chain and result in seafood that is unfit for human consumption. To illustrate these impacts, 2,125 birds were either found dead or died after collection as a result of the Cosco Busan oil spill in San Francisco Bay. Recovery workers after the 1989 Exxon Valdez incident, which spilled 11 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Alaska, collected about 30,000 dead oiled birds and 1,000 dead sea otters, among other animals. Untold wildlife likely was not included in these collection numbers.

Luckily, San Diego County is moving in the right direction to end our dependence on fossil fuels. We are developing a Regional Decarbonization Framework, which identifies strategies to get our region to zero carbon emissions. This effort also includes a strategy for ensuring that oil and gas workers in our region aren't left behind by our rapid transition to renewable energy.

Today, we are further advancing our support for Representative Levin's legislation, H.R. 3053 the American Coasts and Oceans Protection Act which would prohibit any new leasing for the exploration, development, or production of oil or natural gas along the Southern California coast, from San Diego to the northern border of San Luis Obispo County. We have prepared a resolution to this effect, which would be transmitted to Senators Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla, Representative Mike Levin, and any other interested parties.

Further, the impacts from the Amplify oil spill will likely continue to reverberate along the San Diego coast for years to come. The County should also advocate for ongoing federal monitoring and testing of our waters to better understand the impacts linked to offshore oil drilling. Today's board letter will also add to our legislative program additional efforts to monitor petroleum-based pollutants along our coastlines.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to adopt a resolution supporting the American Coasts and Oceans Protection Act supports the Sustainable Environments/ Thriving Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2021-26 Strategic Plan by ensuring that we are supporting our coastal economy, and are a leader in protecting our sensitive coastal habitats from the impacts of offshore oil drilling.

Respectfully submitted,



CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER  
Supervisor, Fourth District



SUPERVISOR LAWSON-REMER  
Supervisor, Third District

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/oilspills.html>

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**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Resolution A. A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO IN SUPPORT OF THE  
AMERICAN COASTS AND OCEANS PROTECTION ACT.