

Who's Watching the Oil Industry in Los Angeles?

Kristy Pyke, LAist.com, 6-17-10

The legendary oil spill disaster in the Gulf Coast this April had people all over the world wondering what went wrong. And now a general consensus has determined it was a combination of BP cutting corners and a lack of governmental regulations. But with all eyes on the gulf coast some feel we now need to look back to our own waters and wonder what is going on here in the Los Angeles region. What needs to be done to prevent any more damage to our waters?

A couple different state agencies play a role in monitoring and regulating drilling operations in California and off our coasts. The Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) oversees drilling permits to rework, plug, or expand oil wells while the California State Land Commission (CSLC) deals with oil spill prevention and is responsible for monitoring the marine oil facilities both onshore and offshore. The Marine Facilities Division (MFD) has the specific job of regulating the safe and pollution-free transfer of oil between tank vessels and facilities.

The MFD collaborates with about 20 other agencies all a part of the State Interagency Oil Spill Committee (SIOSC) that reviews new regulatory initiatives and policies regarding spill prevention.

Even the Department of Fish and Game has an Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) that is the leading agency in spill response, cleanup, and natural resource damage assessment.

But despite the seemingly tight knit web of prevention and regulation, people are still suspicious. With the announcement that the oil has officially reached the American shoreline in the Gulf, the effects of this disaster are slowly becoming a harsh reality. Protestors from Hands Across the Sand are just one example of groups or movements fed up with the potential dangers of oil drilling.

Hands Across the Sand plans on drawing a human line in the sand on Saturday, June 26th to shout a loud message to state and federal officials demanding the termination of all offshore oil drilling. Several events will be held in California. "BP is definitely at fault in the Gulf spill and they should be held accountable but really, this goes further than BP. Any offshore oil drilling could have done this," said the event's founder Dave Rauschkolb, "No one industry should be able to place entire coastal economies and marine environments at risk with dangerous, dirty mistakes."

But ironically the termination of oil drilling is far from what is happening. The Huffington Post released an article claiming, "400 Gulf Offshore Drilling Leases Approves by Government AFTER Oil Spill".

According to the DOGGR's 2009 statistical report, District 1 -- from Los Angeles to the San Diego border -- drilled a total of about 27 million barrels from both onshore and offshore sites. And according to VICE magazine, the Los Angeles area is the third largest oil field in the county.

Yet a recent weekly summary stated that notices to drill oil wells in our District have more than doubled since last year while those being plugged or abandoned have decreased. Too bad Los Angeles has yet to tax the stuff.