

# Supervisors unhappy with onshore oil spills

**Sam Womack, Santa Maria Times, 5-12-10**

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors was again dismayed Tuesday by the amount of oil and produced water spilled by onshore operators in the past year.

Since thousands of gallons of crude oil were released — some of which contaminated a nearby creek bed — at Greka Energy's Bell Facility in December 2007, the board has taken an increased interest in regulating onshore oil facilities.

During each public hearing on the issue, the supervisors have expressed disappointment over the results.

In this case, county staff was quick to point out that “the number of violations and spills is going down,” said Dianne Black, Planning and Development Department director of development services.

However, 2nd District Supervisor Janet Wolf said that the ongoing or open violations were “unacceptable.”

“There are at least 50 open violations from the prior year, and I find that to be unacceptable. Why (have they) not been remediated?” said Wolf, the most vocal member on this issue.

“In my opinion, we're still seeing significant, albeit reduced, spills,” she added.

Since the first of the year, onshore oil facilities in Santa Barbara County have spilled more than 300 gallons of crude oil and produced water, according to the staff report Tuesday.

In 2009, 15 separate onshore oil facilities leaked more than 33,000 gallons of crude oil, produced water, hydrogen sulfide and lube oil, according to data from the county fire prevention division.

Only 3,676 gallons were crude oil, while the majority of the spilled liquid was produced water, at 28,999 gallons.

In addition to the spill report, county staff unveiled an online database that lists inspections, violations, fines and spills, but it is only available to county employees.

Black said work is under way to make the compiled information available to the public.

The Board of Supervisors referred to a high-risk petroleum operator ordinance passed by the board majority at the end of 2008.

The law was enacted to enhance protection against onshore oil operators with excessive spills and violations that go unheeded.

Black said county staff has not had reason to use the new provisions in the ordinance since its adoption, and clarified for the board that a facility would need three spills of more than 1,050 gallons within a year to be considered a “high risk operation.”

The trigger amount came as a surprise to 1st District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, who voted in favor of the ordinance, and he asked that the law be brought back to the board, so it could consider a smaller threshold.