

Barge Spills Crude Off Coal Oil Point

Leaks 42 Gallons into Water; Cleaned Up Before Reaching Land

Tyler Hayden, Santa Barbara Independent, 10-29-10

A barrel of oil — 42 gallons — spilled from a barge at around 9 a.m. this morning as it was loading crude from Venoco's facility at Coal Oil Point Reserve. The slick was quickly contained, and it appears none of the oil reached land before it was captured with inflatable booms and absorbent pads deployed by three Clean Seas vessels that were stationed nearby.

According to Lisa Rivas, Venoco's community relations manager, a barge operated by one of the company's contractors — Seattle-based Harley Marine Services, Inc. — was disconnecting from the Ellwood Marine Terminal's offshore loading line when oil spilled out of the line and into the water. Coast Guard and Fish and Game personnel were also informed of the spill and helped with assessment and cleanup efforts. No one from Harley Marine Services could be reached for comment.

Dr. Cristina Sandoval, director of Coal Oil Point Reserve, said as soon as she was notified of the situation she went down to the beach to check things out for herself. She didn't notice any oil on the sand, she said, just vessels working to mop up the mess. It was scary nevertheless, she went on, as any news of an oil spill is enough to get her and others nervous about the safety of the coastline and the population of highly endangered snowy plovers that inhabit it.

Barges moor off the UCSB-controlled coast about every two weeks and spend a day loading up their liquid cargo before heading to refineries in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas.

Sandoval said she's noticed that when a barge is docked nearby, the amount of tar increases on the beach. It accumulates on the backside of the boat, she explained, then sloughs off when the barge gets moving again. A snowy plover chick was recently killed after it became stuck in a thick tar ball that had washed ashore, she said.