

# Bill seeks to boost state's safeguards against oil spills

**Rick Daysog, Sacramento Bee, 9-3-10**

In response to the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, California lawmakers are looking to strengthen the state's oil spill prevention requirements.

An Assembly measure now before Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger would allow the state to increase fees on oil shipped into California by as much as \$5.6 million.

AB 234 also requires oil companies and shippers to use precautionary containment booms for all marine oil transfers and calls for tougher safety reporting for existing offshore drilling operations.

"We cannot leave California defenseless against oil spills, especially in the wake of the Gulf Coast catastrophe," said Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, the bill's author.

A blowout at the Gulf of Mexico's Deepwater Horizon rig in April killed 11 workers and dumped more than 200 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Huffman said the California coast has seen seven oil spills during the last two years. In all but one of those cases, precautionary booms – floating barriers used to contain spills – were not used prior to the spill.

Current regulations give oil companies the option of using booms before all marine transfers. If a spill occurs, the company must deploy 600 feet of booming equipment within a half hour of the spill and another 600 feet of boom within an hour.

Jackie Dragon, marine sanctuaries program director for Pacific Environment in San Francisco, said pre-booming has been shown to reduced spill volume by as much as 80 percent in states such as Washington, which requires it.

Dragon said a pre-booming requirement could have prevented much of the damage from recent high-profile spills, such as one in 2007 that dumped more than 50,000 gallons of oil into the San Francisco Bay.

"This bill is California's answer to the gulf wake-up call," Dragon said.

To be sure, a measure raising fees for businesses is a tough sell during a recession.

The state Department of Fish and Game has opposed the measure, according to Huffman.

The Western States Petroleum Association, which represents oil companies in California and five other states, said it has not taken a position but has some concerns about the bill.

Tupper Hull, WSPA spokesman, said that some of the requirements in legislation might be better handled by state regulatory agencies' rules and regulations, which allow for more flexibility.

WSPA also believes that the state's oil spill prevention and administration fund is adequately financed, he said.

AB 234 gives the state the authority to raise the administrative fee that oil companies pay to 6 cents per barrel

from the current 5 cents per barrel on marine transfers of oil.

The increase would generate about \$5.6 million a year for the oil spill prevention and administration fund.

That fund faces a projected budget shortfall of about \$3 million in the 2011-12 fiscal year, which will rise to about \$11 million in three years, Huffman said.

Schwarzenegger has until Sept. 30 to take action on the bill.