



## **FAQS RE: REFUGIO OIL SPILL**

**Updated July 20, 2015 at 10 a.m.**

### **How was Santa Barbara affected by the Plains All American Pipeline spill off the Refugio coast?**

- The city of Santa Barbara was not impacted by the May 19 spill. All Santa Barbara beaches are open, clean and safe for visitors.
- Of the 110 miles of beaches in Santa Barbara County, only four miles of public beaches were affected by the spill.
- Only two major public beaches – Refugio and El Capitán state beaches in the Gaviota Coast area, 20 miles north of Santa Barbara – were temporarily closed. The county’s other two dozen major public beaches remained open the whole time. El Capitán State Beach reopened Fri., June 26 and Refugio State Beach reopened Fri., July 17.
- Two small, less-frequented pocket beaches between Refugio and El Cápitan (Las Flores and Venedito beaches), which are only accessible at low tide, as well as an area north of Refugio will remain closed for final cleanup work, but the closures will not affect beachgoers or campers, according to the State Parks Department.
- Santa Barbara County’s Public Health Department has done 24/7 testing of water and air quality at Santa Barbara County-area beaches and determined they are safe.
- Unified Command crews (made up of federal, state and local agencies) have been doing ongoing monitoring and determined that area beaches remain safe for the public to enjoy.
- No more oil has been found in the waters off the Gaviota Coast since June 3.

### **What is the visitor experience like now for visitors in Santa Barbara County?**

- Visitors can expect the usual clean, safe and pleasant beach experience in Santa Barbara County.
- The only major public beaches impacted by the spill were Refugio and El Capitán beaches about 20 miles north of Santa Barbara, which were temporarily closed. Both have since reopened after being assessed as safe for the public by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Unified Command (made up of federal, state and local agencies). Both are booked up with camping reservations for the summer of 2015, but day-use passes are still available. Visit the State Parks webpage for more info at <http://www.parks.ca.gov>.
- Coastal hotels and beach vendors remain open for business. Visitors can still enjoy everything from biking by the beach and boat tours to surfing and harbor kayaking.
- Seafood at local restaurants is safe to eat. Locally sourced seafood was never at risk because the California Department of Fish & Wildlife acted quickly to restrict fishing in the affected areas of the spill.

- Travelers on Highway 101 between the Refugio and El Capitán area may experience periodic single lane closures. Check the Caltrans website for updates on current traffic conditions:  
<http://quickmap.dot.ca.gov/>

#### **If I go to the beach, will I see tar balls as a result of the spill?**

- It is unlikely visitors will encounter tar balls on Santa Barbara County beaches. Minute amounts of tar\*\* have appeared on some shores in the area, but cleanup crews have removed them and determined the shorelines are safe.
- \*\*It has not been determined what proportion of these small amounts were related to the spill or to natural oil seeps that occasionally occur off the coast. Natural petroleum seeps are quite common in many areas of the world, which can occasionally result in small tar deposits on the shore.

#### **Have Refugio and El Capitán state beaches reopened?**

- El Capitán State Beach reopened Fri., June 26 and Refugio State Beach reopened Fri., July 17. Both were assessed as safe for the public by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Unified Command (made up of federal, state and local agencies). Both are booked up with camping reservations for the summer of 2015, but day-use passes are still available. Visit the State Parks webpage for more info at <http://www.parks.ca.gov>.
- Campers with questions about reservations and overnight camping opportunities should contact a ReserveAmerica representative at 1-800-444-7275 or visit <http://www.reserveamerica.com/> to locate campgrounds nearby. As of July 20, some campsites are still available at the private El Capitan Canyon Resort and Ocean Mesa at El Capitan (<http://www.elcapitancanyon.com/>) and at Gaviota State Beach (<http://www.reserveamerica.com/>).

#### **Are wildlife still being treated as a result of the spill?**

- Yes, but recently very few have trickled in for treatment with signs of oil coverage.
- As of July 15, 57 birds and 62 mammals are in rehabilitation or have been released.
- It's important to note that although nearly 200 dead birds and just over 100 mammals have been recovered since the spill, only some showed visible oiling. Oiling is not an indication of cause of death. The cause of these deaths will not be known until detailed examination of the bodies are performed, which will take some time.

#### **How does the Refugio spill on May 19 compare in size to the 1969 Santa Barbara spill and other major spills in the U.S.?**

The Refugio spill off the Gaviota Coast was only about 3 percent of the size of the 1969 Santa Barbara spill, which galvanized the environmental movement across the U.S. and helped lead to the creation of Earth Day. The Refugio spill involved up to 101,000 gallons of oil (roughly a sixth of an Olympic pool) with an estimated maximum of 21,000 gallons reaching the ocean; while the 1969 spill involved 3 million gallons of crude oil. The 1989 Exxon Valdez spill involved 11 million gallons, while the 2010 BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico involved 210 million gallons.

Visit Santa Barbara continues to monitor the situation and will provide updates on its press releases webpage: <http://www.santabarbaraca.com/media/press-releases/>. Media requests related to tourism: Karna Hughes, Visit Santa Barbara: (805) 966-9222 or [karna@santabarbaraca.com](mailto:karna@santabarbaraca.com)