



SANTA BARBARA OIL SPILL – JANUARY 28, 1969

Spill Data

- An uncontrolled blowout on a Union Oil platform lasted for eight days.¹
- Total of 100,000 barrels of oil (3.36 to 4.2 million gallons) spilled.²
- Approximately 100 miles of coastline affected.³
- The oil slick covered hundreds of square miles of Santa Barbara Channel waters.⁴

Cleanup Efforts and Techniques

Some cleanup methods used to combat this spill in 1969 are similar to the methods being employed today in the Gulf of Mexico.

- Mud and cement were used to plug the leak.⁵
- Skimmers scooped up oil from the ocean surface.⁶
- Airplanes dumped an unrecorded amount of dispersants, such as Polycomplex A and Corexit, on oil up to two miles from shore.⁷
- Approximately 3,000 tons of straw were spread on beaches to soak up oil; straw.⁸
- High-pressure washing rinsed oil off rocky beaches.⁹

Ecological Impact

- Seabird populations fared worst as an estimated 3,600 birds died, according to the California Department of Fish and Game.¹⁰
- The feathers of grebes, cormorants and other seabirds were soaked in oil.¹¹
- Shorebirds, such as plovers, godwits, and willets, which rely on clean beaches for food, fled the oil-covered coastline.¹²
- Cases of dolphins and seals washing ashore were also reported.¹³
- Oil dispersed through the water column killed fish and intertidal invertebrates and devastated kelp forests.¹⁴

Economic Impact

- The spill closed commercial fishing in the area from February 1969 until April 1970.¹⁵
- Officials reopened beaches June 1, four months after the spill.¹⁶
- Estimate recreational value lost was \$3.15 million (in 1969 dollars).¹⁷
- Cleanup costs exceeded \$4.5 million (in 1969 dollars).¹⁸
- Beachfront home, apartment, hotel and motel owners filed a class-action lawsuit and were awarded \$6.5 million (in 1969 dollars).¹⁹
- Commercial and recreational boat owners received \$1.3 million for property damage and loss of revenue (in 1969 dollars).²⁰
- Union Oil paid \$9.5 million (in 1969 dollars) to the state of California, Santa Barbara County and the cities of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria for loss of property.²¹

¹ County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Energy Division. "Brief Oil and Gas History of Santa Barbara County." <<http://www.countyofsb.org/energy/information/history.asp>>.

² NOAA Hazardous Materials Response Assessment Division. "Oil Spill Case Histories, 1967-1991: Summaries of Significant U.S. and International Spills." Sept. 1992.

<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/book_shelf/26_spilldb.pdf>. pp. 162-163.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Energy Division. "Blowout at Union Oil's Platform A."

<<http://www.countyofsb.org/energy/information/1969blowout.asp>>.

⁵ NOAA/HMRAD, p. 163.

⁶ Clarke, K.C. and Jeffrey J. Hemphill. *The Santa Barbara Oil Spill, A Retrospective*. Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, Ed. Darrick Danta. University of Hawaii Press. Vol. 64, pp. 157-162.

<<http://www.geog.ucsb.edu/~kclarke/Papers/SBOilSpill1969.pdf>>.

⁷ NOAA/HMRAD, p. 162.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Energy Division. "Blowout at Union Oil's Platform A."

¹¹ Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network. "1969 Oil Spill." <<http://sbwcn.org/wildlife-education/oil-wildlife/1969-oil-spill/>>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Clarke and Hemphill.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ NOAA/HMRAD, p. 162.

¹⁶ NOAA/HMRAD, p.163.