

Senate Bill 44

Coastal Oil Well Cleanup and Remediation

Senator Jackson

SUMMARY

SB 44 will protect California's unique coastal environment, and the people who live near or visit its beaches, through the development of a coastal hazard removal and legacy oil and gas well remediation program. This program will redirect up to \$2 million dollars of annual revenue derived from state mineral leases to the State Lands Commission in order to do the following:

- Study oil seepage in coastal waters and tidelands to determine points of origin, seepage rates, and environmental impacts.
- Prioritize and plan remediation efforts for orphaned oil wells identified in the 2016 assessment along the California coastline.
- In conjunction with the Division of Oil, Gas, & Geothermal Resources (DOGGR), cap or otherwise remediate abandoned legacy oil and gas wells that pose a hazard to public health, public safety, or the environment.

BACKGROUND

In the 1890s, the Summerland Oil Field in Santa Barbara County became the site of the world's first offshore oil well. Early offshore oil drilling pre-dated the creation of the regulatory agencies and well record keeping requirements that govern today's oil industry. The infrastructure associated with many of these oil operations was removed long ago without much thought given to the permanence of well caps or other remediation efforts. Often these legacy wells were inadequately plugged, or the plugs have degraded over time, which has allowed oil to leak into the surrounding water, fouling our oceans and beaches on a regular basis. Along the Santa Barbara coast where many of these old wells are, residents and beach users regularly see oil in the water and on the sand, smell the noxious odors associated with oil, and live with the associated negative impacts to the ocean and coastline.

The Becker Onshore Well in Santa Barbara County is one such well that was improperly abandoned. According to the State Lands Commission, oil from the

leaking well causes sheening to occur in the ocean off Summerland Beach, creating a threat to the health and safety of the public and the marine environment. Since records do not exist for most of these wells and almost all the companies that operated these legacy wells are long out of business, including the operator of the Becker Well, the responsibility to remediate this and other coastal hazards associated with early oil extraction falls on the landowner, the State of California.

SOLUTION

The State Lands Commission has a demonstrated history of successfully remediating oil wells located in California's tidelands, and has taken a leading role in removing the coastal hazards related to legacy oil development like wood and steel pilings, railroad irons, pipelines, and wooden beams and structures. Research the Commission completed in 2016 identified approximately 200 improperly capped "orphan" oil wells that risk contaminating our coastal waters through the continual seepage of oil.

SB 44 redirects up to \$2 million dollars annually to a fund set aside for the remediation of these improperly abandoned legacy wells. With this fund, the Commission can begin identifying precisely which old wells are leaking oil and prioritize remediation to address the highest risk wells first.

SUPPORT

STATUS

Introduced

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