



PRESS RELEASE

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LAWSUITS CHALLENGE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION ON SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA OIL PIPELINES

LEGAL ACTION TARGETS PIPELINE THAT CAUSED REFUGIO OIL SPILL AS WELL AS OTHER ONSHORE AND OFFSHORE OIL PIPELINES

Los Angeles, Calif– Conservation groups today filed two lawsuits in federal court, one against the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (“PHMSA”) and the other against the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (“BSEE”), for refusing to release information concerning inspections and other oversight of oil pipelines located in southern California, including Plains Pipeline, LP Line 901, which spilled more than 140,000 gallons of crude oil at Refugio State Beach in May 2015. According to the lawsuits, PHMSA and BSEE failed to disclose information requested pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), which requires federal agencies to provide requested information within 20 working days. To date neither agency has provided any responsive records to the Environmental Defense Center (“EDC”) and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper (“SBCK”) several months after receiving the requests.

“The Plains pipeline spill at Refugio State Beach showed how little we know about the oil pipelines running under our beaches and parks, and through our communities,” stated Brian Segee, Senior Attorney with EDC. “Our lawsuits are intended to help bring needed transparency regarding not only what went wrong at Line 901, but how we can avoid future disasters at other major regional pipelines in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and those serving offshore oil platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel.”

“The recent oil spill from the Plains pipeline was a disaster that could and should have been avoided with proper oversight. We need to get to the bottom of what went wrong so we can learn from mistakes that were made and prevent these types of spills from happening again,” said Kira Redmond, Executive Director of SBCK. “Our community wants answers, and the agencies

responsible for overseeing that pipeline and others that criss-cross our coast need to provide those answers.”

The first FOIA case, brought against PHMSA (an agency within the Department of Transportation), involves two FOIA submissions by EDC and SBCK, a May 22, 2015 request regarding PHMSA’s oversight of the failed Plains Line 901, and a May 27, 2015 request regarding PHMSA’s oversight of the M-143 and Tosco oil pipelines, which are the primary pipelines for conveying oil produced in Ventura County and southern Santa Barbara County (Carpinteria).

The second FOIA case, brought against BSEE (an agency within the Department of the Interior), involves a July 20, 2015 request by EDC regarding BSEE’s oversight of pipelines located in federal Outer Continental Shelf (“OCS”) waters. These pipelines transport water, natural gas, oil, and other hazardous materials to and from the offshore oil platforms located in the Santa Barbara Channel.

“Aging offshore pipelines pose just as great a risk as onshore pipelines, if not more,” stated EDC Attorney Brian Segee. “These risks are further heightened by the increased use of fracking and acidizing from offshore platforms located in the Santa Barbara Channel, and yet there is little to no public information available concerning the oversight of these pipelines by federal agencies.”

The FOIA submissions in both cases requested documents relating to agency pipeline oversight including inspection reports, orders or other formal correspondence, as well as notices of violation and other enforcement actions.

EDC and SBCK submitted the FOIA requests at issue in response to the Refugio Oil Spill. In the wake of the spill, numerous concerns have been raised regarding the strength and efficacy of federal, state, and local oversight of pipelines. There is growing concern about the overall integrity of the nation’s pipeline system, in particular aging pipelines such as Line 901.

Although it is known now that an inspection of Line 901 conducted earlier this year revealed significant corrosion and anomalies, the public does not have any information regarding the history of this and other oil pipelines. Such information could be useful in guiding regulations for future pipeline inspections and operations. Although SB 295 (Jackson - 2015) will require annual inspections for intrastate pipelines beginning in 2016, federal regulations, which govern the pipelines at issue in these lawsuits, are not as strict. Information gleaned from these inspection reports and other documents may help secure increased inspection requirements and safer pipeline operations, resulting in fewer pipeline oil spills.

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*The **Environmental Defense Center**, a non-profit law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community based organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and environmental health. Learn more about EDC at www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org*

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds through science-based advocacy, education, field work and enforcement.
Learn more about SBCK at www.sbck.org