

Santa Barbara County Releases ExxonMobil's Revised Plan to Restart Offshore Platforms, Truck Oil in California

Final Environmental Study Revives Proposal to Use Dangerous Highway 166

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Santa Barbara County has [released](#) a revised final environmental impact report for ExxonMobil's proposal to transport oil by tanker trucks so it can restart three drilling platforms off California, setting up hearings and a vote on the project this fall. Santa Barbara County Planning Commission hearings on the plan were set for Sept. 29 and Oct. 1.

The plan calls for up to 70 oil-filled trucks per day on coastal Highway 101 and hazardous Route 166, 24 hours a day, for up to seven years. Santa Barbara County planning staff last year [recommended against](#) trucking on Route 166 as too dangerous for motorists and natural resources such as the Cuyama River.

The county revised the [original FEIR](#) that was released in July 2020 following news in August 2020 that Phillips 66 is shutting down its Santa Maria Refinery and related pipelines by 2023, placing an end date on ExxonMobil's preferred option for getting its offshore oil to market.

“ExxonMobil wants to put California communities and motorists in harm's way, just to restart its dirty and dangerous offshore platforms,” said **Kristen Monsell**, ocean legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “It's unbelievable they still want to use hazardous Highway 166 over the strong objections of county planning staff. These decrepit offshore platforms should be decommissioned instead of brought back to life to threaten our lives and climate.”

The FEIR concludes that there would be significant, unavoidable impacts from the project, including significant impacts on wildlife and cultural resources in the event of an oil spill from a tanker truck. The FEIR does not analyze the numerous harmful impacts of bringing Exxon's offshore platforms back online.

“The county's final environmental impact report fails to disclose the devastating

impacts that will result if ExxonMobil is allowed to resume oil drilling in the Santa Barbara Channel and truck oil along our scenic highways,” said **Linda Krop**, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center, which represents Get Oil Out! and SBCAN. “ExxonMobil’s proposal will result in more oil spills, air pollution, and increased climate change at a time when we need to pursue clean energy alternatives.”

A majority of Santa Barbara County voters say they oppose proposals to restart ExxonMobil’s offshore drilling platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel, according to a [November 2019 poll](#). Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents said they were concerned “about the safety of our local highways if up to 70 oil tanker trucks are allowed on our roads each day.”

“Trucks are the least safe way to transport oil — in human death, property destruction, and amount of oil spilled,” said **Katie Davis**, chair of the Sierra Club’s Los Padres Chapter. “Not only that, but this environmental report is severely lacking by leaving out the oil spills and other risks of restarting the aging oil rigs and Gaviota Coast oil facilities, which were one of the largest sources of air pollution in the county. No wonder this proposal has faced immense backlash and opposition from Chumash elders to students to businesses to city councils.”

ExxonMobil’s three offshore platforms near Santa Barbara were shut down in 2015 after the Plains All American Pipeline ruptured and spilled thousands of gallons of oil along the California coast. The company proposes to restart its platforms and load its offshore oil onto tanker trucks at its Las Flores Canyon processing facility. The trucks would transport up to 470,400 gallons of oil per day up to 140 miles to refineries in Santa Maria and then Kern County.

“In light of the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, we are reminded that climate change is happening now, and it is worse than we thought,” said **Ken Hough**, executive director of the Santa Barbara County Action Network. “We cannot afford to approve any new projects that will facilitate fossil fuel extraction in Santa Barbara County, including ExxonMobil’s proposal to restart its platforms and truck its oil. We need companies like ExxonMobil to stop polluting our atmosphere, air, and waters, and to instead lead the renewable energy transition.”

California suffers hundreds of oil-truck incidents a year, and many result in oil spills. There were 258 trucking accidents along the route from 2015 to 2021, California Highway Patrol [data show](#), resulting in 10 deaths and 110 injuries. A tanker [truck crashed](#) off Highway 166 in March 2020, spilling more than 4,500 gallons of oil into the Cuyama River above Twitchell Reservoir.

Tanker trucks spill hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil per year, according to an [American Petroleum Institute report](#). These oil spills can cause fires and explosions. An [Associated Press study](#) of six states where truck traffic has increased because of increased oil and gas drilling found that fatalities in traffic accidents have more than quadrupled since 2004 in some counties.

“Not only do the Chumash people originate from our local lands and waters, but Chumash culture itself is created from the relationship we have maintained with all beings in these ecosystems since time immemorial,” said Alicia Cordero, First Nations program officer with the Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation. “It is our sacred duty to protect

and care for this natural abundance that all beings depend upon. As residents in the Chumash homelands today, we call on all of the peoples of Santa Barbara County to share this responsibility with us to safeguard the area's natural cultural resources. We must reject Exxon's dangerous proposal which presents an unacceptable risk to these lands, waterways, and the ocean itself."

Offshore oil development also poses unacceptable risks of spills and air and water pollution. Oil spills near the Santa Barbara coastline threaten a wide range of federally protected endangered species, including blue whales, [sea otters](#) and California tiger salamanders.

"As an organization representing the younger generation, we are concerned for the health and safety of our local community as well as the implications that a seven-year trucking program will have in the fight against climate change," said Soham Ray of the UCSB Environmental Affairs Board. "ExxonMobil knows that it is a significant contributor to climate change yet continues to exacerbate the problem by pushing projects like this unsafe and unjust trucking plan."

ExxonMobil plans to restart its offshore platforms and onshore processing facility will also generate enormous levels of [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and contribute to climate change, undermining goals set by the county's Energy and Climate Action Plan adopted in May 2015.

The coalition opposing ExxonMobil's trucking plan includes Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation, 350 Santa Barbara, the Center for Biological Diversity, Climate First: Replacing Oil and Gas (CFROG), Environmental Defense Center, Food and Water Action, GOO!, SBCAN, Sierra Club's Los Padres Chapter, UCSB Associated Students External Vice President for Statewide Affairs Esmeralda Quintero-Cubillan, UCSB Environmental Affairs Board (EAB), Surfrider Foundation Santa Barbara County Chapter, Los Padres ForestWatch, and the Cuyama Valley Community Association and the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation.



Image from animation of trucking accidents along Exxon’s proposed route, 2015-2021. (Curt Bradley/Center for Biological Diversity)

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