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VENTURA COUNTY CRUDE OIL PIPELINES

“May 2015 - Oil Spill – Refugio Beach – Santa Barbara County” This recent oil spill raises the obvious questions: Could this happen in Ventura County? What are the safeguards, checks and balances, and processes at work in the arena of crude oil pipeline safety? Are they working effectively to protect Ventura County residents, the environment, and institutions from harm? What information is available to the County to help prepare for, or better yet, avoid a crude oil spill?

The State of California is the third largest oil producer in the United States. Ventura County is the third largest oil-producing county in the State, with hundreds of miles of crude oil pipelines of various sizes and types.

The 2015-2016 Ventura County Grand Jury identified the multiple government agencies at the Federal, State, and County levels sharing responsibility for the crude oil pipeline permits, as well as the oversight of pipeline construction, maintenance, testing, repair, operations, and deactivation. These responsibilities vary by pipeline location and function.

Authority for crude oil pipelines regulation is spread among multiple government entities at multiple levels. The Federal government has ultimate responsibility for setting minimum standards for crude oil pipelines, but it can and has delegated permitting and operational oversight to the State of California.

The County’s responsibility over oil pipelines has two components:

- The permitting function for a significant portion, but not all, of the pipelines in its unincorporated areas
- First responder in the event of a spill

The Grand Jury found that no single government entity has a complete grasp of critical information such as test history, test validity, and risks associated with the total pipeline array in the county. That information does exist but is spread among multiple government entities. The information is available to the County if it chooses to access it. However, the Grand Jury found

that the county does not have a thorough understanding of the state of the total crude oil pipeline array within the County.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors require the development of an annual report which summarizes the state of the crude oil pipelines within the County. This report, which can take advantage of the data available from various regulatory agencies, should identify those pipelines with risks discovered during testing, as well as the risks associated with pipelines that have not been tested/verified by a third party or observer as required by the governing regulations. It should also identify those pipelines not in compliance with the conditions imposed by the Conditional Use Permits and summarize the spill events and their causes since the last report.

The complete report may be accessed at www.ventura.org/grand-jury; click on the Annual Reports tab and consult “Fiscal Year 2015-2016.”

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