

Safety Alert

MMS

U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Pacific OCS Region

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Skim Pile Sheening Incident

Recently, a pollution incident occurred when oil droplets were released from a platform skim pile. Lubricating oil was released into the ocean, creating a sheen in the Santa Barbara Channel.

A Minerals Management Service (MMS) and U. S. Coast Guard (USCG) investigation into this incident revealed that the sheen was from the open bottom of the skim pile. The skim pile was discovered to have clogged risers, which allowed the oil to remain trapped below the baffle plates, contributing to the escape of oil through the open bottom of the skim pile. A deck cleaning surfactant, introduced into the skim pile through the deck drains several days before the pollution incident, interacted with the oil in the pile and may have contributed to the release of the oil from the bottom of the pile.

To minimize the occurrence of similar incidents, the following measures should be taken:

- Lessees and operators should review or develop preventive maintenance and inspection procedures for the skim piles to ensure skim piles are performing optimally and that risers are not clogged. Detailed maintenance records should be maintained which identify dates of inspections, findings and actions taken.
- Lessees and operators should not introduce surfactants or other chemicals into the skim pile unless the effects of the chemicals on the skim pile are known and the chemicals have been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for disposal in this manner.

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