



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
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In response to your recent correspondence pertaining to the Santa Barbara Channel oil situation, I am sending you the following statement which summarizes my views. The Department of the Interior is deeply interested in all opinions expressed by concerned citizens on controversial issues and appreciates your comments.

As the result of my visit to Santa Barbara on February 2, I became deeply impressed with the sincerity of the local people who were outspoken against leasing and drilling. Even if the blowout had not occurred, my own sentiments are on the side of those people who are speaking out for their right of self-determination against drilling. Quite bluntly, I would have made a different decision from my predecessor.

This problem was handed to me by the previous administration, but that does not mean I can ignore my responsibilities to the Nation now that I am Secretary of the Interior. I have done everything possible within my discretionary powers as Secretary to move in the direction beneficial to Santa Barbara. Let me list a few of these actions for you:

1. We shut down all drilling and production operations.
2. I directed my staff to come up with a more stringent code of drilling regulations. The views of knowledgeable people in industry and in the Government of the State of California have been and are being sought.
3. I ordered a massive scientific and engineering study of the Santa Barbara Channel by task forces of the Department.
4. We created a permanent Ecological Preserve and a larger buffer zone totalling 55,000 acres seaward from Santa Barbara.
5. I have pledged that the Department will not permit any other leasing in the Channel without soliciting public comment, and a thorough review by the concerned citizens of the area themselves.

6. We required all companies holding Federal leases in the Channel to submit company technical data to the Department for use in our intensive review along with our own information.

I want to emphasize that the blowout well at Platform A, six miles from Santa Barbara was shut down and now, except for remedial work to relieve pressure and collect oil seepage, no other activity is being permitted at Platform A. Knowledge gained here can be applied toward a program to eradicate the natural seeps that have been long known along the coast in the Channel area.

Oil and tar pollution is not new in this region. Many references to oil slicks appear in reports published even before drilling began on the Union Oil Company lease. Of course, the blowout and resulting oil spill that occurred during the ten-day period beginning January 28 was simply more than any sensible American should be expected to take. Further, I believe we are agreed that any future offshore operations anywhere on the Continental Shelf must be restricted under new drilling regulations which would make similar disasters in the future as unlikely as it is humanly possible to insure.

On April 1 production and drilling operations, interrupted by my earlier order, were permitted to resume for five leases at three sites--but only after a lease-by-lease review and investigation of drilling procedures and the geological and technological data for each site. This decision was necessary because I had gone as far as any Secretary could go up to this point. The factors compelling this action are:

1. The Federal lessees agreed to operate under the new drilling regulations, which are far more restrictive than before.

2. Geological and engineering analyses of the sites were completed and reports showed that more than 2,000 feet of protective geologic formations lie above the oil-bearing beds. Furthermore, the casing program and other safety devices satisfied our most rigid requirements for safety.

3. The five leases selected for resumed activity are at a substantial distance from Santa Barbara and the blowout locality. Two of them are in waters adjacent to Ventura County, two of them are more than 20 miles west of Santa Barbara, and the fifth lies about ten miles southeast of Santa Barbara. The geological conditions at these sites are different from that at the blowout locality.

4. More than 30 State leases are active east and west of Santa Barbara within the three-mile limit. This geological basin has been an oil and gas producer for more than 70 years and the natural resource is an integral part of the economy of southern California.

5. Finally, let me stress that the Federal leases issued in Santa Barbara Channel prior to my assumption of office constitute binding contracts with the United States and create property rights protected by the Constitution. For this reason, they cannot be arbitrarily cancelled by the Secretary of the Interior. I am certain that, even in the present circumstances, you would not suggest or condone any action on my part which would violate constitutional guarantees or otherwise fail to recognize the limitations on my authority under the governing provisions of law.

I would like you, the citizens of Santa Barbara, and all other concerned Americans, to know that we have endeavored to take responsible and constructive actions in this matter. In addition to the efforts we have made, I would support legislation establishing a nationwide, well-reasoned system to protect scenic shorelines in America.

Sincerely yours,



Secretary of the Interior