

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region IX
POLLUTION REPORT

Date: Friday, March 28, 2008

From: Craig Benson

Subject: Continuation of Action

Toro Creek

1073 Toro Canyon Road, Summerland, CA

Latitude: 34.4569000

Longitude: -119.5600000

POLREP No.:	16	Site #:	Z918
Reporting Period:	01/01/08 - 3/28/08	D.O. #:	
Start Date:	1/12/2005	Response Authority:	OPA
Mob Date:	1/12/2005	Response Type:	Time-Critical
Demob Date:		NPL Status:	Non NPL
Completion Date:		Incident Category:	Removal Action
CERCLIS ID #:		Contract #	EP-R9-05-01
RCRIS ID #:		Reimbursable Account #	
FPN#	117026		

Site Description

See POLREP 1 and POLREP 15 in the documents link at www.epaossc.net/torocreek.

EPA involvement with the Toro Creek Oil Spill site was initiated in the summer of 1997 to support the California Department of Fish and Game (CADFG) with cleanup and control actions following vandalism that disabled a State installed oil/water separation system at this historic oil well site. In the years prior to the 1997 spill event, the State Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) and CADFG had responded to numerous oil discharges to Toro Creek and the Pacific Ocean resulting from primitive and improperly managed private oil/water separation systems on-site.

The site is in a steep forested canyon (Toro Canyon) near Summerland, Santa Barbara County, CA. The Site is bordered upstream by the Los Padres National Forest, and by private property on the downstream edge. Land use in the Toro Canyon area is a mix of residential and agricultural uses, and as a perennial stream, the Creek provides critical wildlife habitat. Up to 50 gpm of an oil/water mixture discharges at the headwaters of the Creek in the area of an abandoned collapsed oil mine portal dug some 200 feet into the side of the canyon. Historical records indicate this well was constructed in 1882 by excavating a horizontal shaft into the side of Toro Canyon. After the oil "miners" struck a heavy flow of ground water in the shaft, they then built a primitive oil/water separator and sold the water for irrigation downstream.

POLREPS 1-11 (through May 1999) summarize the completion of the cleanup actions resulting from the 1997 spill event and describe the design, installation and field modifications to an EPA installed oil/water separation system. The main components of the system include an 800 gpm capacity two clarifier system featuring a primary bottom-less stainless steel separator with underflow baffles for oil-water separation. It was placed directly on top of the seep resulting in an upflow from the bottom into the separator. The separated oil flows into a buried chemhose pipeline which drops 300 feet in a 900 foot run to the collection tank. The tank is a 6,000 gallon capacity conventional double-walled fiberglass underground storage tank (UST) providing secondary containment and is typical of those installed at gasoline stations.

Treatment system inspection and maintenance activities have been accomplished under a series of uninterrupted site-specific EPA contracts since FPN inception. The latest contract was awarded in January 2005 and involves approximate tri-weekly site and treatment system inspections/coordination with the OSC and periodic transfer of accumulated oil to an approved facility.

EPA access to project operation and maintenance funds from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF) will be terminated in 2008. Since early 2005, EPA and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) efforts have focused on attempts to transition project operations to a local or State agency.

EPA/USCG could not obtain a commitment from an affected state or local entity for continued operation and maintenance of the system. In the past three years, there have been numerous meetings and phone

conferences between local, state and federal stakeholder agencies, however no specific alternate funding source and/or lead agency transition strategy was identified.

In September 07, EPA was informed that the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to not become involved with the Toro Creek project, including any participation in future system operation and oil handling. This includes being a grantee for possible State Water Resources Control Board Cleanup and Abatement Account funding.

The Toro Creek oil separation begins at the artesian headwaters (water/oil) to the Creek. Natural oil seeps are often associated with water springs: oil floating to the surface of the water. Specific contribution, if any, of a historic 19th century horizontal well to the occurrence of oil in the headwaters is not specifically known. The State of California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) have been consulted on the matter. DOGGR characterizes the site as a natural seep, similar to others in Toro Canyon. The natural oil seeps in existing onshore and offshore in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties cannot be sealed or plugged. The oil can only be collected, if desired, for transportation to refinery or oil production facility.

Current Activities

02/28/08:

EPA regional personnel participated in a phone conference with the USCG, National Pollution Fund Center. The USCG will discontinue funding the EPA for on-going oil/water separation system management and accumulated oil handling effort. The emergency situation at Toro Canyon has been addressed and federal funding and authority for long-term system operations have been exhausted. EPA has no independent funding to continue system management.

The 1992 and 1997 oil spill events at Toro Creek, which resulted in the State and Federal response/enforcement efforts, were caused by vandalism and failure of storage tanks associated with primitive oil/water separation systems. These large one-time releases resulted in the flow of thousands of gallons of oil along the length of the Toro Creek. EPA will decommission the current system so that no oil will be accumulated in the storage tank, but will flow naturally with the artesian source at the Creek headwaters.

03/28/08:

Involved staff from the RWQCB, fire departments, OSPR and other agency recipients of this POLREP are encouraged to contact OSC Benson and EPA should they wish to contribute to Federal project closeout activities.

Planned Removal Actions

Tri-weekly site and system inspections will continue until system decommissioning is complete.

Next Steps

- Continue coordination with NPFC Case Officer Hildebrand.

Key Issues

- No current media interest.
- In this reporting period, there have been no incidents affecting system performance. There has been no slope instability caused by illegal soil disturbance activities and the dirt access road is in good repair.
- The average monthly collection of oil remains within the range first predicted in 1997 (approx. 15.5 bbl/mo.).

response.epa.gov/torocreek