

The Main Wire

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## Advocacy Group Cites Eco Factoids in Call California Drilling

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--Authentic Eco Experts Not Buying Claims

By Leah Girard

If drilling resumes near the Santa Barbara oil reserves, California could reduce its foreign oil imports by 50% according to a documentary advocating offshore drilling -- prompting some immediate dissents.

"Why would we get oil from other countries who don't like us when we have so much ourselves?" said Lad Handelman Co-founder of Stop Oil Seeps California in the documentary, exhibited in Washington as part of the pro-drilling campaign.

According to the documentary, drilling could cause California to see a \$300 million-\$400 million revenue increase in addition to extensive job creation.

Jerry Taylor, senior fellow at The **Cato Institute**, said, according to the group, "Developing known offshore California reserves would be a \$1 trillion mega steroid shot to the state's economy."

Matthew Simmons, member of the SOSC advisory board said during the documentary that drilling would "help balance the California budget."

However, some experts think the risks of such drilling are too high for the advertised benefit. Mike McGinnis, Director of the Ocean and Coastal Policy Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, told MNI, "Any offshore gas activity has risks -- especially for leaks -- all risks associated should be considered without narrowly defining the benefit."

"The risk of a [drilling platform] spill ... has nothing to do with reality" with all the safety regulations, said Bruce Allen, SOSC co-founder. It is more likely, he said, that a spill would be caused by an international oil tanker carrying imported oil. Drilling domestically, he maintained, would be less of a risk.

SOSC's main message is that not drilling causes even more oil leakage into the environment. In certain areas, such as Santa Barbara, fissures in the earth allow for oil and gas to escape naturally. According to a report by the National Academy of Sciences, "natural oil seeps contribute the highest amount of oil to the marine environment, accounting for 63% per cent of the annual load to the world's oceans."

The documentary cited research that showed drilling would release the pressure on area

underground oil reserves-reducing the pollutant gasses emitted from seeps. With the Santa Barbara seeps being the second largest, the documentary stated removing that pollution would aid the animals in the environment as well as the air quality.

McGinnis disagrees, "there may be some truth to that, but those facts are not universal across the Santa Barbara Channel -- they are seriously over-generalized." The 27 oil rigs already in the channel are the No. 1 one threat to marine sea life, especially the platform called "Harmony" which is three times the size of the Empire State Building.

Although they disagree on how to proceed, both sides desire environmental protection for Santa Barbara.

Naturally occurring or not, "Oil in the marine environment is pollution -- there is no argument about that," said Allen.

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