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Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors Rejects Permits for Sable Offshore Corp.

The decision is another major setback for the Texas company attempting to restart oil and gas operations on the Gaviota Coast

SANTA BARBARA, CA—The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors today rejected the transfer of permits to Sable Offshore Corp., the embattled oil company seeking to restart a huge oil and gas operation formerly owned by ExxonMobil on the Central Coast of California.

The Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to continue today's hearing to December 16 and directed staff to prepare findings to support denial of Sable's application.

The vote is another blow for Sable, which in recent months has been hit by felony criminal charges, a state Attorney General lawsuit, and losses in court. Under County law, Sable cannot operate its onshore facilities without the permits.

"This company created its own minefield of litigation, fines, notices of violations, and even criminal charges in a matter of months," said **Tara Rengifo, Senior Attorney at the Environmental Defense Center** (EDC), during a presentation to the Board. "Sable's disregard for our community, our natural resources, and our laws must be met with a resounding 'no' vote today."

The Texas-based Sable is attempting to take over permits to operate onshore facilities, including oil and gas processing plants in Las Flores Canyon and the same pipeline that burst in 2015, causing the Plains oil spill at Refugio State Beach. The facilities are part of the Santa Ynez Unit (SYU), which also includes three old offshore drilling platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel.

At today's hearing, dozens of residents, experts, students, Tribal leaders, and business owners spoke against the restart of the corroded pipeline and other facilities and urged the Supervisors to deny the transfer of permits.

To take over Exxon's permits, Sable had to demonstrate that it had the training, skills, and resources to operate responsibly. However, Supervisors agreed that Sable's history of violations made it clear that the company could not meet this requirement. In recent months, Sable racked up 21 criminal charges by the Santa Barbara County District Attorney, a lawsuit from the state Attorney General, and a historic \$18 million fine from the state Coastal Commission.

"The evidence in this case is overwhelming," said Supervisor Steve Lavagnino. "There is something wrong with the strategy of Sable's leadership. Trying to simply bulldoze through the permitting process has not been helpful and is not the way we expect businesses in Santa Barbara County to conduct themselves."

In February, a previous Board of Supervisors hearing on the permit transfer resulted in a tie vote, meaning the County did not approve the transfer of the permits. Sable, Exxon, and their affiliates sued to force the transfer, and in July, the Court granted a request by EDC and its clients to intervene in the case. In September, a federal judge rejected Sable's demand for an immediate transfer of permits and ordered the Board of Supervisors to revisit the matter.

EDC is leading a statewide coalition of environmental groups, students, Tribal organizations, businesses, and concerned citizens opposed to the restart of the old equipment on the Gaviota Coast, including a defective pipeline responsible for one of the worst oil spill disasters in state history just 10 years ago. EDC's clients in this case are the Sierra Club's Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter, Santa Barbara County Action Network (SBCAN), Get Oil Out! (GOO), and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper.

Client Quotes

"The Board of Supervisors' decision to deny this permit transfer today is an important step, but our work continues. Sable's record proves this company cannot be trusted to operate these aging facilities safely or respond adequately to a disaster. Without adequate financial assurances, County taxpayers could face billions in cleanup costs. Our Sierra Club members and our community thank the Supervisors for recognizing and taking action on these unacceptable risks," said **Maureen Ellenberger, Sierra Club, Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter**.

"Santa Barbara stood up for the Gaviota Coast and our marine environment today. We applaud the Board of Supervisors for listening to the public's concerns and denying Sable's permit transfer application. Sable has racked up violations from multiple state agencies, \$18 million in penalties, and 21 criminal charges from the County District Attorney, demonstrating a poor track record of operating responsibly. Today's decision reaffirms our community's commitment to protecting the coast and upholding environmental laws," said **Ted Morton, Executive Director of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper**.

"Santa Barbara County Action Network has been opposed to the transfer of ownership and permits from ExxonMobil to Sable Offshore for nearly two years. In light of Sable's recent history of disregarding orders from state and local regulators, SBCAN is relieved that the County Board exercised its discretion today to reject the transfer of permits," said **SBCAN Co-Executive Director Ken Hough**.

"In August, there were two spills at Sable's facilities. One was 280 gallons of hydrochloric acid. The other was about 5,000 cubic feet of sludge caused by operator error. And over just two months, our local Air Pollution Control District issued four separate violation notices to this company for not following air permit rules. This shows a pattern — this operator has repeatedly failed to comply with the rules that protect public health and our environment," said **Michael Lyons, President of GOO**.

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