

UC SANTA BARBARA

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LOCAL OIL INDUSTRY EXAMINED IN UCSB STUDY

A report chronicling the evolution of oil extraction in Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties says the industry presence here has been responsible for many technological advances but is now on the wane and statistically never has been either a boon or a bane to local economies.

Commissioned by the Minerals Management Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the three-year study by UC Santa Barbara researchers will serve as background for future federal decisions regarding the industry.

"This study is a history of the oil and gas industry in each of the three counties," said Jim Lima, a social scientist for the MMS. "This provides us with the detail we need for environmental analysis of future plans based on what we know has happened in the past."

The economic portion of the report concludes that there is little evidence that the oil industry has had a significant impact on the economies of the three counties, said economics professor Perry Shapiro.

"... While oil exploration and production is undoubtedly an integral part of the local economies, the data do not support a conclusion that the activity is a net contributor to these economies," Shapiro said.

Neither will oil have a significant impact on local economies in the future, the report predicts.

"Our conclusions are that the amount of oil is diminishing, therefore the return is diminishing," said Krista Paulsen, a doctoral student and co-project manager with sociology professor Harvey Molotch.

In Santa Barbara and Ventura counties and in the Santa Barbara Channel, companies will continue to pump from existing wells, Paulsen said.

Some new wells may be attempted in the Channel by a land-based process called slant-drilling,

she said, although the report predicts much opposition to such a proposal.

"We foresee a lot of resistance to

that kind of project," Paulsen said. In San Luis Obispo County, the oil business is all but over, the report says, although clean-up and restoration of oil pollution sites will continue. "We don't really see any future there," Paulsen said.

Doctoral student Tom Beamish, a member of Molotch's team, found that state-of-the-art oil technology -- particularly in the area of offshore drilling -- was often developed in the three counties.

"The offshore technology developed here was used in Africa and the North Sea," Paulsen said.

Beamish also found that pioneering work in oil cleanup was accomplished here and that environmental consulting companies have proliferated in the area in response to the presence of oil and strict environmental regulations found in California.

History professor Randy Bergstrom led a team that recorded the presence of various oil enterprises year-by-year and found that though the bulk of the extraction was performed by large companies, there were many smaller and independent companies at work as well.

The report also looks at a number of more specific historical and sociological issues such as what it has been like to be an oil worker over the past 50 years and gender composition of workers on the offshore platforms.

Copies of the report, which was mailed Tuesday, can be perused at local libraries, including the university libraries at UC Santa Barbara and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, the Santa Barbara Public Library and the Ventura College Library.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.