UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

January 28, 2025
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Professor David Valentine’s toxic waste discovery featured in LA Times documentary at SBIFF

UC Santa Barbara Professor David Valentine has been making headlines since 2020 for discovering evidence of widespread toxic-waste dumping off the California coast. The news caused outrage and concern, prompting action from state and federal agencies and from congress. The dust likely won’t settle for decades.

“Out of Plain Sight,” a documentary produced by the Los Angeles Times and Sypher Studios, expands upon the newspaper’s coverage of the discovery, extent and potential impacts of unscrupulous disposal of DDT and low-level radioactive waste first discovered by Valentine and his team. The film made its debut in November 2024 at DOC NYC and will have its West Coast premiere at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival (SBIFF).

“I have spent years unraveling a toxic mystery that the ocean had buried for generations, and this story was begging to be told more visually — with a more profound exploration of how the horrors of our past continue to affect us and our future,” said L.A. Times journalist and Pulitzer finalist Rosanna Xia, who directed and produced the film with Daniel Straub.

While the full scope of issues raised in the film is still emerging, scientists know there are problems with DDT and related chemicals off the California Coast.

Valentine, who is featured in the documentary, hopes this film will stir the public and promote action.

“When I first set out on this path more than a decade ago I felt that I had a unique opportunity to speak for the deep ocean, which has no voice of its own,” Valentine said. “This film provides that voice in a way I could not — allowing audiences to experience one challenge faced by our oceans in a deeply immersive way.”

“The filmmakers managed to thread the needle perfectly by creating a captivating film that remains firmly grounded to the truth,” he added.

The documentary will show three times during the festival:

- 6:00 p.m. Friday, February 7 at SBIFF Film Center
- 12:00 p.m. Sunday, February 9 at the Riviera Theatre
- 9:20 a.m. Monday, February 10 at SBIFF Film Center
- 3:00 p.m. Saturday, February 15 at SBIFF Film Center

Director Xia will lead a panel discussion following Sunday’s screening, which will feature Valentine and several other researchers from the film. Tickets for the events are available on the SBIFF website.

Tags
Ocean and Beaches

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draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.