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On April 23, 1988, the mechanical failure of a flexible internal pipe that drains rainwater from the floating roof of a 325,000-barrel oil storage tank, coupled with an open levee drain valve, allowed approximately 8,700 barrels of San Joaquin Valley crude oil to enter Peyton Slough and the connecting Shell Marsh. The oil subsequently flowed into the Carquinez Straits and, in varying degree, affected the shoreline from Mare Island to Point Edith, a distance of about 10 miles. It also affected some of the adjoining sloughs and marshes from Peyton Slough to Point Edith and limited areas of Ryer, Simmons and Roe Islands northeast of Point Edith.

As part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Oil Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures (SPCC) program, as authorized by the Clean Water Act, EPA conducts unannounced inspections at SPCC-regulated facilities. These inspections are conducted to ensure industry awareness of the SPCC regulations and to confirm the adequacy of SPCC plans that are required to be prepared by all SPCC-regulated facilities. SPCC inspections are conducted by EPA on-scene coordinators or by the technical assistance team.

Currently, an SPCC inspection consists of three activities: (1) identifying a facility; (2) securing and reviewing the SPCC plan; and (3) conducting an on-site inspection of a facility. An EPA Task Force has investigated the SPCC program and has subsequently recommended changes in the inspection procedures. The EPA plans to increase the number of inspections conducted annually, and to change inspection procedures.

The modified EPA inspection procedures will consist of five steps: (1) targeting and identifying the facility; (2) conducting a desk-top background review; (3) securing and reviewing the SPCC plan; (4) conducting the facility inspection; and (5) enforcing recommended actions and conducting follow-up inspections.

Awareness of the anticipated modifications to the components of SPCC inspections will enable owners/operators of SPCC-regulated facilities to conduct their own facility inspections, thereby reducing costs, possible fines, and the likelihood of aboveground oil storage tank failure.