

# San Francisco Chronicle

June 12, 2008

## Governor backs bills improving guidelines for oil spills response

Bipartisan effort to improve training for emergencies

By John Wildermuth  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Government response to oil spills like the one that polluted San Francisco Bay last fall would get a boost under a group of measures backed Wednesday by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

He met with lawmakers to endorse bills to improve emergency response guidelines as a result of the Cosco Busan spill in November and to unveil the action his administration is taking on the subject.

"We must do everything we can to protect and preserve California's natural resources for future generations," he said at the Sacramento meeting. "There is so much at stake . . . and today's actions will successfully enhance our oil spill prevention and response efforts."

The meeting came as a welcome surprise to state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, whose bill to require more training and drills for the groups that respond

to oil spills is now before the Assembly.

"It's nice to get a signal early on, since the governor typically holds off (support) until a bill is on his desk," Simitian said. "There was a lot of frustration after the Cosco Busan spill. We had a good law on the books that was adequately funded, but when the emergency happened, it failed."

The South Korea-bound container ship banged into one of the towers of the Bay Bridge during a heavy fog, spilling an estimated 53,000 gallons of fuel oil into the bay. Cleanup efforts were slow to start, allowing the oil to spread across the bay and up and down the coast. More than 2,500 birds died as a result of the spill, with cleanup costs swelling to \$100 million or more.

"This bipartisan package of legislation deals with the governor's promise to deal with the oil spill problems and crack down on those responsible," said Lisa Page, a spokeswoman for Schwarzenegger.

But Assemblywoman Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, isn't convinced that Schwarzenegger is going far enough to improve the state's response to future oil spills.

**"This is a start, but unfortunately it's only window dressing. We need to do much more."**

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LONI  
HANCOCK, D-Berkeley

"This is a start, but unfortunately it's only window dressing," she said. "We need to do much more to actually solve the problems we're facing."

Schwarzenegger did not voice support for bills by Hancock and a number of other Bay Area legislators that would take more direct — and more costly — action to prepare for spills.

A measure by Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, would tighten oil-spill-response standards and establish a \$5 million annual technology development grant. Two Hancock bills would require a new program for training local volunteers, grants to local governments for cleanup equipment and \$19 million a year more for the state Oil Spill Prevention and Administrative Fund, the money coming from

increased fees on crude oil and petroleum products that pass through the state's ports, terminals and pipelines.

Besides Simitian's bill, the governor endorsed legislation by Assemblyman Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, that will require tougher oversight of inland oil-producing facilities, and another by Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Davis, that will add to penalties for inland and marine oil spills.

Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria (Santa Barbara County), Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee, R-San Luis Obispo, and Assemblyman Cameron Smyth, R-Santa Clarita (Los Angeles County), also joined the governor at the event.

It's important to look at the Cosco Busan spill to see what didn't work and prepare the state and its emergency responders for the inevitable next time, Simitian said.

"We can't afford to use an emergency as the next opportunity to practice," he said. "We need to ensure that when the next one happens, we're ready."

---

E-mail John Wildermuth at  
jwildermuth@schronicle.com.