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TESTIMONY OF
DAVID LEWIS
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SAVE THE BAY
BEFORE THE
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT
POLICY COMMITTEE

DECEMBER 10, 2007

SAVE THE BAY

Commissioners:

I am David Lewis, Executive Director of Save The Bay (Save San Francisco Bay Association). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of San Francisco Bay, our region's greatest natural treasure.

Save The Bay is the oldest and largest organization that works exclusively to protect and restore San Francisco Bay. We were founded in 1961 to prevent the Bay from being filled in, and we represent more than 10,000 members and thousands more volunteers around the region. Our work has made the Bay cleaner and healthier, and reconnected residents to it. We involve thousands of volunteers annually to restore the Bay's shoreline, and have educated more than 35,000 students on the Bay's waters over the last decade.

The Bay Area's quality of life and economy depend on a healthy and vibrant Bay. San Francisco Bay defines our region and its identity, provides recreation and beauty, and is the engine of our economy, attracting tourists and businesses from around the world. As the largest and most important estuary on the west coast, the Bay provides vital wildlife habitat for 105 threatened and 23 endangered species. Millions of birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway rely on the Bay for food and refuge, and it is a nursery for Pacific Ocean fisheries. In the midst of seven million people, the Bay contains the largest urban wildlife refuge in the nation and the largest wetland restoration efforts on the West Coast.

The Cosco Busan oil spill is a tragedy for the Bay and the fish and wildlife that live in it. We are alarmed that this oil spill happened, outraged at the inadequate preparations and emergency response, and appalled at the destruction the oil has caused. This huge dose of pollution is devastating to the Bay's environment and disruptive to the economy, and it may have long-lasting effects on the Bay's severely-stressed ecosystem that we work so hard to restore. A faster and more comprehensive response could have contained and skimmed more of the oil before it spread so far, but we also know that the spill could have been much larger if the ship's course was slightly different.

Since the spill, our staff and volunteers have helped federal wildlife agencies document the oil's impacts so they can quantify the extent of damage to the Bay. The extremely toxic oil is threatening significant damage at some of the Bay's most sensitive habitats, including areas where Save The Bay has been working to restore and improve habitat around the Bay.

We are demanding a full investigation into the accident's causes, and supporting state and federal oversight hearings like this one today that can reveal what went wrong and enact changes to prevent future spills, improve cleanup coordination, spill preparedness and response, and environmental damage assessment. We will insist on restitution from the responsible parties to restore and compensate the Bay for wildlife and habitat destroyed by this spill.

Some of the impacts of the spill are obvious: dead and injured birds, smothered marshes, fouled beaches, idle fishing fleets, and reduced public access to the shoreline. Others are less visible: poisoned fish, shellfish, marine mammals, and other underwater plant and animal life. Oil is already entering the food chain, and whatever is not removed from the Bay could continue releasing toxics into the environment for decades.

Strategies to Improve Spill Preparedness and Coordination

We have asked federal and state legislative committees to investigate the Coast Guard's preparations and performance before during and after the accident, determining where there were shortcomings in planning, training, equipment, command procedures, coordination, communication, implementation and execution. We also want them to investigate whether inadequate resources were devoted to these tasks, or were inappropriately or unwisely allocated for other purposes within the Coast Guard.

In addition, we support calls for an independent commission, to look at all that the federal agencies did and did not do — a broader inquiry and policy review that can make recommendations for how to :

- Improve navigational safety through vessel traffic control procedures and ship hull improvements
- Improve containment of oil spills through faster deployment of booms and skimmers, prepositioning of equipment, enhanced emergency communications, regularly updated interagency planning, and more frequent practice drills
- Reduce risks to fish and wildlife, sensitive habitats and water quality from ships carrying highly toxic fuels and hazardous cargo.
- Ensure that those responsible for poisoning San Francisco Bay pay the full cost of responding to this spill and restoring the natural resources of this Bay over the time it will take to accomplish that task.

Build on Strong Local Support for the Bay

In the midst of this destruction, we also are heartened by the overwhelming outpouring of support and concern from the entire Bay Area community: offers of trained hazardous materials teams from cities, boats from local fishermen to skim oil, impromptu neighborhood efforts to deploy booms that could protect sensitive lagoons and creeks, volunteers wanting to clean beaches, philanthropists with emergency funds for bird rescue. Far too many of these offers were refused or ignored by agencies that had no plan to mobilize or coordinate them, provoking frustration and arguably compounding the damage to the Bay.

That demonstration of support for the Bay is phenomenal, almost universal here in the Bay Area. This spill has underscored that counties, cities, and individual residents want

the Bay protected and restored, and are willing to help with their own assets, personnel, equipment, even their bare hands. This community is an enormous and underutilized resource for the federal and state governments to craft a better plan for oil spill prevention and response that emphasizes first responders, and plans to incorporate the region, its cities and its residents.

It would be wise to build oil spill response plans upon relevant plans that are in place or should be in place for other emergencies, including earthquakes and other natural disasters, as well as chemical spills and other man-made disasters. In each case there should be clearly identified first responders, clear command structure and responsibilities, plus adequate communications protocols and equipment.

Upon this foundation, it would be appropriate to add a second layer of response capabilities, coordinated contributions from cities and counties that have trained personnel with relevant skill sets, such as handling of hazardous materials. A third layer could be plans to enlist volunteers with prior training and experience, and untrained volunteers who could be quickly trained with key skills.

Oil spills may require some unique skills and tasks, but much of what is required may be similar to skills needed to respond to other emergencies. The City and County of San Francisco may be well-positioned to take a leadership role in galvanizing the larger Bay Area family of cities and counties to do more coordinated emergency planning and response, not just for oil spills, and perhaps not even primarily for oil spills.

There may be plans already in place upon which to build, and there is also an entity in place to study how to do this. The Fritz Institute's Bay Prep Initiative <http://www.fritzinstitute.org/prgBAPI.htm> seeks to improve disaster preparedness in the San Francisco Bay Area and especially ensure that vulnerable communities have been taken into account in disaster planning. The institute is trying to identify and address gaps in preparedness including:

- How to enlist community- and faith-based organizations,
- Developing partnerships and solutions among emergency practitioners from the public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors
- Creating standards of preparedness that emphasize the greatest benefit for the least cost.

We appreciate the leadership of the Commission in starting this discussion, and we are prepared to assist you in any way that we can.

Thank you.