



PRESS RELEASE
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**COUNTY AGENCIES ON-SCENE OF GEOLOGICAL PHENOMENON
SMOULDERING WEST OF ARROYO BURRO BEACH PARK**

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) – At approximately 9:30 a.m. the California Office of Emergency Services received a report of a strong odor and smoke seen emitting from the hillside just above the sand near Arroyo Burro Beach Park.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department responded to the scene and is reporting the cause is a geological phenomenon on the beach approximately one mile west of Arroyo Burro Beach Park. The phenomenon occurs when deposits of oil shale embedded in the sedimentary rock spontaneously combust due to friction and begins to smolder. With current wind conditions in the area, a constant influx of oxygen continues to fan the smoldering process—much like blowing on two sticks while trying to start a campfire.

The smoldering section of the hillside is about 10 feet up from the beach covering an area of approximately three-feet by four-feet. It sloughs off small rocks from time to time, so County Fire has closed the immediate area as a precaution and crews remain on scene to remove any nearby vegetation that is growing above the site in the unlikely event of ignition.

This geological event is naturally occurring and happens occasionally, and carries with it the faint smell of burning hydrocarbons.

Santa Barbara County Environmental Health staff confirmed with the Fire Department personnel on-scene that there is no active seep or threat to waterways.

County Fire also reported detecting low levels of hydrogen sulfide on the beach within 50-feet of the cliff face. While the detected levels are well below those thought to cause adverse health effects, the County Public Health Department, Environmental Health Services recommends that people avoid the areas above and particularly below the area of concern on the beach due to the fact that hydrogen sulfide is heavier than air and tends to sink and collect in low-lying areas.