

THE BP DEEPWATER OIL DISASTER:

CONSEQUENCE OF MISGUIDED ENERGY POLICY

On April 20th, 2010, the failure of United States' energy policy once again was demonstrated in the Gulf of Mexico. An explosion engulfed the Deep Horizon exploratory drilling platform, leased and operated by British Petroleum, and led to its collapse and sinking days later. The wellhead 5,000 feet below the surface of the ocean was ruptured and remains so. Remotely-operated robot submarines failed to shut emergency valves to stop the flow of oil. The leaking well is now spilling hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil per day into the Gulf, which will eventually reach the shores, bayous and marshes of the Gulf Coast. This is a human, economic and environmental tragedy. Some of the facts:

- 11 workers were killed in the explosion and capsizing of the rig.
- BP initially estimated that 1,000 barrels (42,000 gallons) of crude oil per day were spilling from the broken pipeline to the sea. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association raised that to 5,000 barrels (210,000 gallons) per day, 5x more than what the Coast Guard and industry say they can clean up. No one knows exactly how much oil is spilling. Estimates of the oil spill rate range up to 25,000 barrels (1,050,000 gallons) per day as of April 30, 2010, according to the Wall Street Journal.
- Marshes that line the Louisiana coast are expected to be heavily impacted by the spill and will likely suffer long-term damage. These areas are important wildlife refuges that are home to over 600 species, including many rare and endangered animals. They also host 5 million migratory birds annually. (FULL LIST http://media.nola.com/news_impact/other/wildlife-at-risk-oil-spill.pdf)
- The spill is occurring during the peak spawning and nesting season for many fish, birds and mammals in the Gulf region, which increases the threat to these species and future populations.
- At least 10 wildlife management areas and refuges in Louisiana and Mississippi are in the oil plume's path. A State of Emergency declaration notes that billions of dollars have been invested in coastal restoration projects and may be at risk. Species in danger include blue fin tuna, whales, many bird species, sea turtles, and otters.
- Technology that might have stopped this is required in other countries and industry officials said they cost around \$500,000. The U.S. Minerals Management Service considered mandating the use of remote switches since at least 2000, but industry argued against it, and in 2003 MMS said, "[remote] systems are not recommended because they tend to be very costly." For comparison, BP made \$6 billion in profit during the first quarter of 2010, and spent \$3.5 million lobbying that same quarter.
- According to The Times-Picayune, the area under threat produces the largest total seafood landings in the lower 48 states, is a vital wintering or resting spot for more than 70 percent of the nation's waterfowl, and is used by all 110 neo-tropical migratory songbirds. Researchers say 90 percent of all the marine species in the Gulf of Mexico depend on coastal estuaries at some point in their lives, and most of those estuaries are in Louisiana—endangered by an oil spill that could last months.
- The state of Louisiana reports that significant quantities of oil reaching land might force closures of oyster beds in some areas or hurt the shrimp harvest, which generates about \$962 million in annual retail sales. Louisiana is the largest seafood producer in the lower 48 states, with annual retail sales of about \$1.8 billion. Recreational fishing generates about \$1 billion in retail sales a year in the state. Saltwater sport fishing generates about \$757 million in annual economic impact in Louisiana, while sustaining more than 7,700 jobs. (Source: <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-04-29/oil-spill-imperils-gulf-coast-fishing-industry-update1-.html>)

SOLUTIONS

Allowing the dirty fossil fuel industry to continue with business as usual won't make America energy independent; it will only leave us with a spoiled environment and more global warming pollution. Climate and clean energy policy should move us away from oil, not further subsidize our addiction to this dangerous and dirty fuel.

- There should be a ban on any new offshore drilling
- This disaster is a terrible example of the cost of using fossil fuel and we must make the move away from fossil fuel use
- We need to make the decisive commitment to phasing in clean/renewable energy and efficiency technologies so as to preclude these terrible accidents and catastrophic climate change.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico is a human tragedy and an economic and environmental catastrophe. This is what happens when dirty industries like oil, coal and nuclear write our nation's energy policy.

Tell your Senators that "drill, baby, drill" and business as usual have to end and that there's no place for industry giveaways and dirty energy. Go to <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/gulf-oil-spill> and tell your members of Congress to act for a clean energy future.

A HISTORY OF OIL DISASTERS

Perhaps the most famous oil disaster in the U.S., is the Exxon Valdez, one of the largest ever in the U.S. The timing of the spill, the remote and spectacular location, the thousands of miles of rugged and wild shoreline, and the abundance of wildlife in the region combined to make it an environmental disaster well beyond the scope of other spills. The impacts of that spill are still visible and felt by people and animals in the region two decades after the disaster. The BP Deepwater is possibly already worse a disaster than Exxon Valdez, and it continues to worsen.

The world's second largest oil spill, Ixtoc I, was a well blowout like the BP Deepwater Disaster, this one in the Bay of Campeche, Mexico. That incident was caused by a 2-mile deep exploration well that blew out in June 1979, and was not brought under control until March 1980. It released over 3 million barrels of crude oil. U.S. officials predict that, like Ixtoc I, it will take months to contain this disaster.

In 1969, the Santa Barbara oil spill was also a rig blow out. It contaminated the beaches off Santa Barbara County in Southern California. Over a 10-day period, 80,000–100,000 barrels of crude oil were released, and resulted in over 10,000 birds being killed. This disaster is sometimes credited with helping to spark the environmental movement of the 1970s and lead to the decades-long drilling moratorium off the U.S. Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

