



# THE 2010 GULF OF MEXICO DISASTER

## A Month of Failures—And Plans for the Future

On the 30-day anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion that has led to what may be one of the worst environmental disasters this country has ever seen, Defenders of Wildlife takes a look at 20 ways the oil industry and our federal government have failed to keep us safe from the dangers that offshore oil and gas drilling poses to wildlife and coastal habitats. We also recommend 10 ways that Congress and the administration can make changes that could help prevent future oil catastrophes and mitigate the impacts of the current crisis.



OIL RIG © U.S. COAST GUARD

1. In a [failure to appropriately weigh cost and benefits](#), the U.S Minerals Management Service (MMS) decided several years ago not to require offshore drilling rigs to include remote-controlled shut-off mechanisms because “they tend to be very costly.”
2. Despite a 2008 report by Inspector General Earl Devaney detailing the lack of accountability and ethical standards at MMS, the Bush administration and Congress [failed to act on the report](#) and reform the agency.
3. A [history of spills and rig fires](#), including a “significant pollution incident” in 2005, failed to raise red flags about operations aboard the Deepwater Horizon.
4. On April 6, 2009, MMS granted British Petroleum (BP) a “categorical exclusion,” exempting them from submitting an environmental impact analysis of the Deepwater Horizon rig because [a massive oil spill was “unlikely.”](#)
5. Multiple [failures lead to malfunctions in safety devices](#) on the Deepwater Horizon rig.
6. In a [catastrophic failure](#), on April 20, BP’s Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, [killing 11 workers and injuring 17 others](#). On April 22, the rig sank.
7. Transocean and BP declined to comment on their [decision not to invest in a back-up safety valve](#) for the Deepwater Horizon rig, which would have cost the oil giant \$500,000. (Note: BP [makes \\$93 million in profits in a single day](#).)
8. Rough weather [rendered cleanup technology ineffective](#), and high waves and stiff winds kept oil skimmers and other environmental cleanup vessels from leaving port.
9. Underwater robot submarines [failed to activate emergency shut-off valve](#) on wellhead.
10. Controlled burns and chemical dispersants targeted oil slick on the water’s surface, but did not effectively tackle [oil plumes spreading throughout Gulf waters](#).
11. Giant dome lowered over leaking well [failed to contain oil](#).
12. Gulf closures mean a [failed fishing season](#), and left the seafood industry scrambling to gather the season’s harvest. Louisiana’s seafood industry alone brings in \$2.4 billion per year.
13. Failure to learn a lesson: Shell intends to move forward as planned with exploratory [oil and gas drilling in the Arctic’s Beaufort and Chuckchi seas](#) this summer. The administration refused to put a hold on Shell’s activities for the summer or until a comprehensive assessment of what went wrong in the Gulf is complete – even though spill cleanup would be even more difficult in an Arctic setting.

14. Booms failed to keep the spreading oil slick from making landfall, and oil washed up on shores of Breton National Wildlife Refuge and into Louisiana's coastal marshes; tar balls washed up on Dauphin Island, Alabama.
15. At Senate hearings, executives from the three companies involved in the Gulf oil disaster - BP, Transocean and Halliburton – all failed to accept responsibility for the ongoing crisis.
16. Investigations showed BP is using dispersant chemicals provided by a company with links to the oil giant, and that have proven less effective and more toxic than alternatives, according to the EPA.
17. Congress failed to make a decisive move away from dirty, dangerous fossil fuels and promoted offshore drilling in a bill intended to move American toward a “clean energy future.”
18. In a failure to acknowledge the scope of the disaster, the amount of oil being spilled into Gulf waters may be at least ten times the amounts reported by BP and federal agencies.
19. Another BP oil rig in the Gulf, the Atlantis, was found to be operating with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents. A BP official warned this deficiency could “lead to catastrophic operating error.”
20. Congress failed to expedite legislation to raise liability caps for oil companies whose operations cause damaging oil spills from \$75 million to \$10 billion.

## TEN OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

1. Protect our coastlines from future offshore drilling disasters through immediate reinstatement of the moratorium on offshore leasing, whether by executive order or congressional action.
2. Expand the offshore drilling moratorium to include Alaska's Arctic Ocean, an ecologically vital region where oil spill cleanup technology does not exist and where Coast Guard response capabilities are severely limited. Include a moratorium on seismic and exploratory drilling, proven to be risky, dangerous operations.
3. Rescind government approval of exploratory drilling by Shell Oil, due to begin in the Arctic in less than 60 days.
4. Pass a clean climate and energy bill that does not include incentives for offshore drilling.
5. Fund expanded response capacity for national wildlife refuges, estuarine reserves and other sensitive areas in the Gulf so that those areas will be protected and restored as oil comes ashore in the coming weeks and months.
6. Protect endangered sea turtles in the Gulf by providing sufficient funding for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the states to shepherd beaches, protect eggs and help newly emerged hatchlings make it safely to sea.
7. Provide emergency funding for NOAA and FWS to monitor and assess the impacts of the oil spill and dispersant chemicals on imperiled wildlife such as sea turtles; sperm, humpback and finback whales; Gulf sturgeon; least and roseate terns; and Mississippi sandhill and whooping cranes.
8. Provide funding for the FWS Environmental Contaminants Program and Natural Resource Damage Assessment programs, at the forefront of agency response to the Deepwater Horizon spill and other natural resource disasters.
9. Ensure that BP pays the full costs of the spill by funding a National Academy of Sciences one-year study of the long-term ecosystem service impacts of the spill on Gulf natural resources.
10. Form a new Gulf Marine Ecosystem Landscape Conservation Cooperative co-led by NOAA and FWS to focus on efforts that will better identify where biological resources are in relation to oil and gas infrastructure and risk.