



The Effects of Offshore Drilling in Florida

According to the U.S. Census, more oil spills have occurred in the Gulf of Mexico over the past decade than those that took place in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans combined.

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On April 20, 2010, Transocean Deepwater Horizon offshore platform exploded and caught fire, causing a major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the world's premier energy basins. The explosion at the Deepwater Horizon rig killed 11 workers and injured 17 as a result of the initial wellhead explosion. The rig subsequently sank, and since then it is estimated that more than 184 million gallons of oil have pumped into the Gulf, devastating the coastline and wildlife. Four states have been directly affected by the spill - Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill is being deemed the worst environmental disaster to ever hit the US. This oil spill is expected to become the worst in the history of the U.S., beating out the former tragedy to hold this ignominious distinction – the Exxon Valdez oil spill that occurred in Alaska in 1989. Oil gushed into the Gulf for 85 days with over 572 miles of the Gulf Coast shoreline oiled.

The effects of this devastating oil spill on wildlife, beaches, local businesses that rely heavily on fishing and tourism, and the overall negative impact to the economy has left many citizens questioning whether offshore drilling is too dangerous for Florida. What is clear is that the environmental and economic impact of this disaster is substantial and ongoing in an already depressed economy. Maritime industries (such as the fishing and shrimping industries) are expected to lose around \$2.5 billion in revenues. Likewise, the tourism industry along the Paradise Coast in Florida is

estimated to likely suffer a loss of \$3 billion. The economic effects of the oil spill have been devastating to the tourism, fishing, real estate, and other local related industries, both from the reality and perception of the spill.

While the capping of the Macondo well in the Gulf on July 15th and the subsequent August completion of a relief well in the Gulf of Mexico stopped the flow of new oil into the Gulf, mitigating the environmental and economic effects of the oil spill will unfortunately take longer, perhaps years to fix, with repercussions still yet to be determined. Moreover, the tangible effects of the oil spill on Florida's environment will likely last for years.

The good news is that efforts to rebuild Florida and the other states affected by the devastating oil spill are under way. During the four month period of this ordeal, thousands of volunteers and response teams have come together to cope with the oil clean up and injured wildlife. Additionally, BP has stated that they are committed to paying all legitimate claims for damages resulting from the oil spill and necessary response costs, to include property damage; net loss of profits and earning capacity; subsistence loss and natural resource damage; removal and cleanup costs; cost of increased public services and net loss of government revenue. Likewise, Florida's legislature has been contemplating a special session on the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and in the interim has been evaluating the economic impact of the spill on Florida.

However, the question remains as to the future of offshore drilling in Florida. Are the efforts to date enough? Should oil drilling be banned in Florida? Or is the answer to use less oil by increasing fuel economy, increasing funding for public transportation and planning for better transportation systems?

Moreover, while fishing and tourism will eventually stabilize in Florida and most of nature will recover, will people's wariness of oil drilling, transport and exploration also slowly fade or will the investigations and research into the cause of the accident and how to prevent such future accidents spur increased changes and perhaps stricter regulations that will improve the safety of deepwater drilling going forward?

I believe only time will tell which course is best for Florida. Undoubtedly, we have learned, and will continue to learn, many valuable lessons in the coming months and years from the Gulf Oil spill. Hopefully, the lessons learned will be used by the industry and government to improve spill prevention and responsiveness both here in the Gulf and in other deepwater drilling locations around the globe.

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