

OFFSHORE DISASTER: Timeline of offshore oil drilling, spills, and regulations

A HISTORY OF OIL DISASTERS

As the Gulf of Mexico oil spill continues to capture headlines around the globe due to its massive size and potential impact, it is useful to look back at the history of U.S. regulation of offshore drilling, and the spills that accompany ocean drilling. The most well known oil spill in the U.S., the Exxon Valdez, was one of the nation’s largest oil spills (257,000 barrels). The impacts of the Exxon Valdez spill are still affecting wildlife in the region over two decades after the disaster.

The world’s second largest oil spill, Ixtoc I, was an oil well blowout like the recent BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, in the Bay of Campeche, Mexico. The Ixtoc blowout occurred in June 1979, but was not brought under control until March 1980. Like Ixtoc I, it took months to contain the oil coming from the BP Deepwater Horizon, and the after effects on the Gulf’s ecosystem will be felt for decades.

In 1969, an oil rig blowout occurred off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. The Santa Barbara oil spill released 80,000-100,000 barrels of crude oil over a 10-day period, and contaminated miles of Southern California beaches. This disaster helped spark the environmental movement of the 1970s and led to a moratorium on oil drilling projects off the U.S. Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

TEN LARGEST OIL SPILLS (including tanker and well incidents):

Gulf War oil spill	Persian Gulf	January 21, 1991	10-11,000,000
BP Deepwater Horizon	Gulf of Mexico	April 20, 2010-present	4,900,000
Ixtoc I oil well	Gulf of Mexico	June 3, 1979– March 23, 1980	3.3-3,500,000
Atlantic Empress / Aegean Captain	Trinidad and Tobago	July 19, 1979	2,100,000
Fergana Valley	Uzbekistan	March 2, 1992	2,100,000
Nowruz oil field	Persian Gulf	February 1983	1,900,000
ABT Summer	Angola	1991	1,900,000
Castillo de Bellver	South Africa	August 6, 1983	1,850,000
Amoco Cadiz	Brittany, France	March 16, 1978	1,600,000
Amoco Haven tanker	Mediterranean Sea	1991	1,060,000

U.S. REGULATION OF OFFSHORE DRILLING: A BRIEF HISTORY

May 28, 2010: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announces a “six-month suspension of all pending, current, or approved offshore drilling operations of new deep-water wells—those more than 500 feet deep”—in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific regions. This moratorium was overturned by a judge; then a new, revised moratorium was issued on July 12 by Secretary Salazar.

- » April 20, 2010: BP’s Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig explodes in the Gulf of Mexico causing a significant oil spill.
- » March 31, 2010: President Obama announces plans to open large swaths of U.S. coastal waters in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico to offshore oil drilling
- » September 30, 2008: Congress, with President Bush’s support, allows the 26-year old moratorium on offshore oil drilling activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) to expire.
- » 2005: Congress passes the 2005 Energy Policy Act which establishes a coastal impact assistance program for Alabama, Alaska, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas to receive a portion of OCS revenues (between 2007-2010).
- » 2000: The Interior Department’s Mineral Management Service (MMS) collects more than \$52 billion in revenues from offshore mineral leases.
- » 2000: The U.S. and Mexico sign a treaty to define the OCS boundary for the western gap (38% to the U.S and 68% to Mexico, with a 1.4 nautical mile buffer zone on each side of the new boundary).
- » 1998: President Clinton extends the 1990 offshore drilling moratorium until 2012, and announces a permanent drilling ban within 12 marine sanctuaries.
- » 1997: The U.S. ratifies the 1978 Treaty on Maritime Boundaries with Mexico to delineate offshore drilling boundaries.
- » 1995: Congress passes the Deepwater Royalty Relief Act to encourage oil development in the Gulf of Mexico by offering royalty relief on oil lease sales.
- » 1994: The California legislature passes the California Coastal Sanctuary Act to institute a ban on new oil drilling leases of state offshore tracts.
- » 1990: Congress passes the North Carolina Outer Banks Protection Act to prohibit leasing and drilling in the federal seabed offshore from North Carolina.
- » 1990: President George H.W. Bush placed a 10-year executive blanket moratorium on all new leasing or preleasing activity in offshore areas.
- » 1989: The Exxon Valdez tanker spills 257,000 barrels of oil of the Alaskan coast.

THE SOLUTIONS

- » The Gulf oil spill and other catastrophes like it are predictable outcomes of our reliance on fossil fuels. We must change course. Congress must act NOW to:
- » Put stricter regulations in place for the coal and oil industries to make them safer and more accountable for the damage they do.
- » Place a ban on new offshore drilling
- » There should be an immediate end to all subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear energy, and investments should be focused on clean renewable energy, efficiency technology, and infrastructure development.
- » Pass legislation that jumpstarts a clean energy revolution in the U.S.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Help prevent another disaster by learning more about clean energy solutions and by taking action at www.greenpeace.org/usa/oilspilltruth

Note: All figures stated are based on August 2010 information