

STOP SHELL'S DRILLING IN ARCTIC WATERS OFF ALASKA

SHELL'S FRONTIER DISCOVERER—THE NEXT BP DEEPWATER HORIZON

As BP's oil continues to spew unabated into the Gulf of Mexico, Shell is pushing forward with plans for exploratory drilling off Alaska's arctic coast. If Shell gets its way, exploratory drilling will begin as early as July in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas—home to many distinctive Arctic species, as well as communities who have relied on these animals and the environment for their culture and subsistence for millennia.

The April 20 blowout at BP's Deepwater Horizon exploratory drill rig took the lives of 11 people, and oil has been spilling into the ocean ever since, despite BP's attempts to stop it. BP has consistently underestimated the amount of oil flowing from its rig, the current spill rate of 5,000 barrels per day (up from 1,000 barrels per day in the early days of the spill) has been challenged by experts who estimate 20,000 to 100,000 barrels are gushing from the well each day. If that's the case, then the spill has already eclipsed the more than 250,000 barrels spilled by the Exxon Valdez in 1989.

Shell is scrambling to show that its plans are nothing like BP's, but it cannot paper over the information contained in its 2010 Exploration Plan for the Chukchi Sea, which states, "a large oil spill, such as a crude oil release from a blowout, is extremely rare and not considered a reasonably foreseeable impact." Shell dismissed the risk of a blowout, just as BP's 2009 Exploration Plan downplayed the possibility of a catastrophic accident with the Deepwater Horizon, suggesting that it was unlikely, or virtually impossible, for an accident to occur. Shell claims that a Deepwater Horizon-type blowout would not occur in the Arctic Ocean because the exploration wells will be drilled in shallow water. However, on May 11 the former head of regulatory affairs at the U.S. Minerals Management Service - the agency with oversight for offshore drilling—testified before the U.S. Senate on blowout occurrence rates and causes, saying that "well control performance for deepwater drilling was significantly better than for shallow water operations." Despite what Shell says, the risk of a blowout is higher in the shallow waters of the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

BP's Deepwater Horizon rig was built in 2001, was **state-of-the-art** and heralded as ushering in a new era of exploratory drilling. In contrast, Shell will use the drillship Frontier Discoverer for exploratory drilling in Alaska this summer. The ship was built in 1966, when Lyndon Johnson was President.

"OIL SPILL CLEAN-UP" IS AN OXYMORON

BP's Deepwater Horizon spill is in a temperate part of the country with substantial oil spill response infrastructure nearby. Yet BP's spill response has been hampered by weather—choppy seas, wind, etc—and "cleanup" in open water has been limited to burning patches of oil or spraying toxic dispersants which merely break the oil into smaller pieces where it can still do damage to the marine ecosystem, not to mention their toxic impacts on marine life. BP's Deepwater Horizon spill demonstrates how difficult it is to respond to an oil spill of this magnitude in the Gulf of Mexico, and "cleaning it up," actually removing the oil from the environment, is impossible. Under optimal conditions, only 10-15 percent of spilled oil is actually removed from the environment. Estimates for BP's spill in the Gulf are a tiny fraction of that, and the well is still gushing oil.



A sample of the breakwater in the mouth of the Mississippi River where it meets the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana
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Coastal waters in Alaska's Arctic are orders of magnitude more harsh than the Gulf of Mexico. "Summer" in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas is characterized by high temperatures in the 40s gale-force winds, week-long storms and heavy fog that restricts visibility. Sea ice is also a factor; Shell's fleet of seven ships for exploratory drilling this summer includes an icebreaker. Most importantly, oil spill response capacity in this remote part of the world is at best inadequate, and oil spill "clean up" in Arctic waters is impossible.

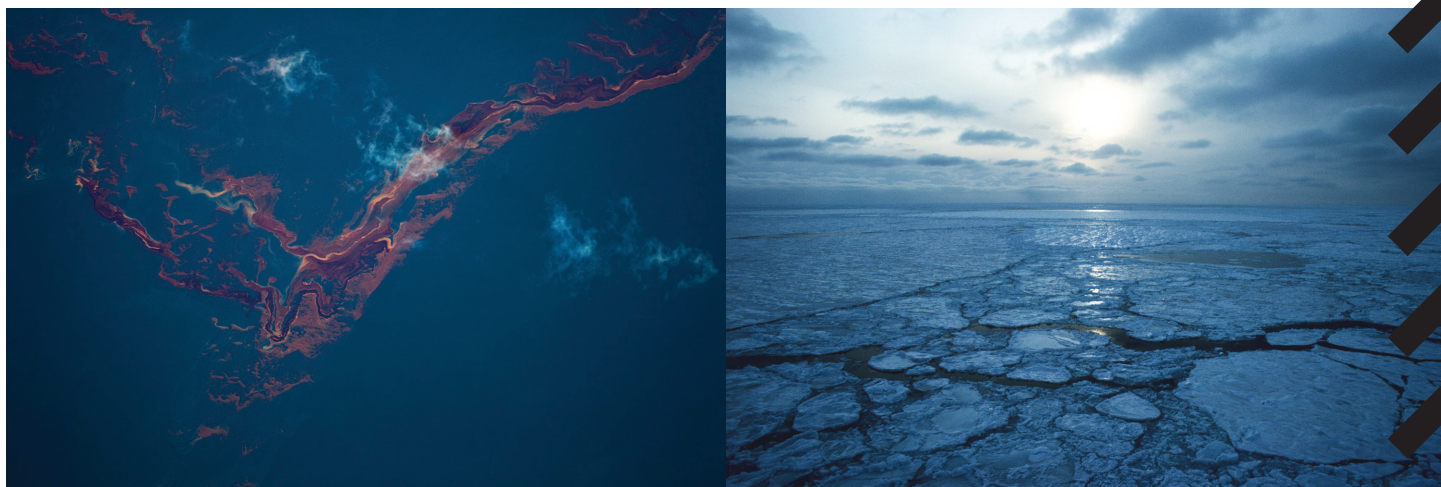
THE ARCTIC OCEAN AT RISK

The Arctic waters of Alaska's Chukchi and Beaufort seas are home to Arctic wildlife such as polar bears, walrus, ice seals and whales, species already under threat as global warming causes their sea ice habitat to melt away. Alaska Native communities have relied on coastal resources for their culture and subsistence for millenia, putting them at ground zero if an oil spill takes place. The Arctic waters of the Chukchi and Beaufort sea are a national treasure and should not be sacrificed to quench the country's thirst for oil.

The US consumes about 25% of the world's oil yet has only three percent of its supply. The US will never satisfy its thirst for oil, even if it drills every last drop of oil from all coastal waters. Given the threats of sea ice loss and ocean acidification, the Chukchi and Beaufort seas as well as the entire Arctic Ocean should be off-limits to oil drilling to allow the wildlife and people who live there the best possibility of adapting and surviving.

GREENPEACE DEMANDS

Greenpeace is calling on US Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to stop Shell's Arctic drilling off Alaska's coasts this summer. Putting the breaks on Shell's Alaska drilling is a first step toward a comprehensive ban on new oil drilling in all federal waters. No part of the US coast should be threatened with oil spills, and no coastal communities should have to bear the economic and social costs that will be felt by Gulf coast communities for decades to come.



Gulf oil spill
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Scattered drift ice is seen here, in Arctic Ocean
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