

***BP Gulf of Mexico Deep Water Horizon Drilling Rig Explosion & Oil Leak Special***

*This awful pollution event is clearly of great relevance to students preparing for Unit 4 who are majoring in Pollution (though if used in preparation for this June, human health threats need foregrounding). There is also clear synoptic relevance for Unit 3. The US quest for energy security has resulted in higher-risk deep water drilling; the implications of the on-going accident for wetlands and marine ecosystems along the southern states' coastlines are extremely serious. There is also scope in keeping an eye on this as an important exemplar for the threats posed to high-value coastlines (Unit 2).*

***Oil spill in Gulf of Mexico 'could be worse than Exxon Valdez disaster*** - Independent 30 April 10

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/oil-spill-in-gulf-of-mexico-could-be-worse-than-exxon-valdez-disaster-1958676.html>

The threat caused by the Mexican Gulf BP oil spill may be as bad as the Exxon Valdez disaster of 1989 (back in 1989, the Exxon disaster caused 11 million gallons of oil to gush into the Alaskan sound, devastating the local wildlife). The new leak is causing oil to flow directly into the sea at the rate of 5,000 barrels a day, which is five times worse than originally suspected. The oil slick on 30 April already covered an area of water the size of Jamaica. (This article provides an excellent comparison of previous oil leaks.)

***This couldn't have happened at a worse time or a worse place*** - Independent 30 April 10

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/michael-mccarthy-this-couldnt-have-happened-at-a-worse-time-or-a-worse-place-1958677.html>

The gigantic oil slick is likely to hit marine and coastal wildlife at the height of the breeding season. This article looks at four species which are most at threat, particularly the sperm whale which has its primary feeding ground at the site of the disaster. There are only about 1,600 sperm whales in the gulf - they are classified as endangered. Others at threat include marine mammals, fish and marine reptiles.

***Coast fouled by lifeblood of the local economy*** - FT 01 May 10

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/bb58f4b6-5488-11df-8bef-00144feab49a.html>

The oil slick is presenting a greater threat to the state of Louisiana than a succession of severe storms. The local economy relies on fishing but stock is soon expected to become contaminated. May marks the beginning of the local fishing season; but fishermen will now not be able to work for months. The oil is also expected to devastate local marshlands as oil drifts onto its shores.

*BP Oil Spill Stories Continued:**BP under fire over containment efforts* - FT 01 May 10

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/45d5fc52-552d-11df-9969-00144feab49a.html>

BP has received criticism for its clean-up effort post the Mexican Gulf oil spill. Local officials said that an early attempt to control the spill - which involved laying miles of orange foot-wide boom - failed when it broke apart. Waves of oil have also simply washed over it. BP has been urged to produce further and more effective lines of defence. The US administration have also criticised BP for being too slow to react. Meanwhile the leak is expected to affect other states soon.

*Deepwater Horizon oil spill: BP's efforts to contain the leak* - 04 May 10

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/may/03/deepwater-horizon-oil-spill-bp-efforts-stop-leak>

Efforts to stop the oil leak have focused on the failure of a standard piece of drilling equipment called the blowout preventer (BOP). It should act as an emergency cut-off to prevent oil gushing from an open well. The BOP failed to work probably causing the recent explosion. It is difficult to fix as it lies more than a mile under water. BP has used robot submarines to try and solve the problem, so far with little effect.

*Oil firm faces questions on safety measures and halting the flow* - 03 May 10

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/may/03/deepwater-horizon-oil-spill-bp-washington-grilling>

The chief executive of BP has been called to Washington for a meeting with US lawmakers and regulators. There is serious criticism of the TNCs reaction to the blown-out well and subsequent oil leak. It has left America's southern states facing an environmental and economic catastrophe. There is criticism that the oil rig did not have enough back-up safety equipment (which is legally required on offshore wells in other parts of the globe).

*Executives 'like deer in headlights'* - FT 05 May 2010

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/457a886a-57dd-11df-855b-00144feab49a.html>

American Congressional investigations into the Gulf of Mexico oil spill result in "blistering, scalding indictment" of the energy industry's behaviour. Members of two energy subcommittees have met with BP executives and will continue to do so over the next few weeks. There has been a call for an investigation into the organisation which regulates offshore drilling to see whether it improperly awarded safety certifications to BP, Transocean, and the Deepwater Horizon rig (the 3 players involved in the design and operation of the rig).

*BP Oil Spill Stories Continued:*

***BP Oil Spill: A Spreading stain*** - FT 07 May 2010

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cfb9731e-593c-11df-adc3-00144feab49a.html>

This article starts with testimony from a first-hand witness who was on the Deepwater Horizon rig at the time the explosion occurred (11 people died and 17 were injured as a direct result of the accident). The article retells Stephen Stone's terrifying ordeal which students will find dramatic and fascinating. The explosion and the resulting oil spill looks set to cause fundamental changes in the way offshore industry is regulated. Events will also decide the future of BP (which for previous misdemeanours, including one in Texas, already has a damaged reputation in the US). A good overall and readable account of the story so far.

***BP fights on the beaches to save the shoreline - and its name*** - Guardian 16 May 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/may/16/bp-gulf-of-mexico-oil-spill>

Thousands of gallons of oil a day continue to leak into the Gulf of Mexico. BP is responsible for the massive clean-up operation as the oil has now hit land. Efforts also continue to try and stem the leaks on the sea bed. Small box-shaped robots are working to fix the faulty equipment (at 5,000 ft depth!). According to one journalist who met with BP's chief executive Tony Hayward, BP is apparently "doing good PR" in order to let the world know that it is trying to clean up its mess. However the long-term damage looks severe, particularly for local wildlife.

***Toxic chemical fear over BP's oil clean-up*** - Guardian 16 May 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/may/16/louisiana-oil-spill-toxic-chemical-bp>

Scientists are concerned that the latest efforts by BP to limit the environmental damage caused by the oil spill involves using a toxic dispersant that may damage ocean life and biodiversity. There have been warnings that the technique to be used is untested and potentially hazardous. The intention is to pump thousands of litres of the chemical Corexit 9500 deep onto the sea bed. But prior to this disaster the dispersant has only been used for oil on the surface of the sea. The oil is now closer to reaching the fragile marsh-lines of Louisiana.