

Offshore drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) threatens our beaches, oceans, coastal communities, and marine life

President Bush and some members of Congress are pressing to open offshore areas that have been protected from oil drilling for many years, including the east and west coasts and Florida. But according to the Bush Administration's own Energy Information Administration, the effect of allowing drilling in these areas on oil prices would be "insignificant." And the environmental and economic costs would be huge.

Onshore oil and gas infrastructure damages coastal lands, economies, and communities

Offshore oil and gas operations require coastal roads, storage tanks, pipelines, processing facilities, and other industrial facilities. These can severely damage beaches, wetlands, and coastal habitat, with consequences for coastal economies that depend on tourism, coastal recreation, and fishing.

Endangering ocean health

Offshore drilling and production create huge quantities of waste that contains toxic and radioactive pollutants, which can contaminate fish and marine life consumed by humans. Drilling waste contains toxic metals, including mercury, lead, and cadmium. Each well creates tens of thousands of gallons of this waste and most of it is dumped untreated into surrounding waters. Each well also discharges hundreds of thousands of gallons of "produced water," which contains toxic contaminants including benzene, arsenic, lead, radium, naphthalene, zinc, and toluene; and petroleum hydrocarbons.

Polluting air and emitting greenhouse gases

Offshore wells emit air pollutants that are known carcinogens, cause respiratory problems, and are greenhouse gases. Emissions from drilling an **average exploration well** include 50 tons of nitrogen oxides, 13 tons of carbon monoxide, 6 tons of sulfur dioxide, and 5 tons of volatile organic compounds. Emissions from drilling an **operational OCS platform** average include 50 tons of NOx, 11 tons of carbon monoxide, 8 tons of sulfur dioxide, and 38 tons of volatile organic hydrocarbons each year.

Seismic surveys harm wildlife

Seismic surveys require the use of air guns, which use explosive blasts to map rock formations on the sea floor. Sound from these underwater blasts can be detected for thousands of miles. Seismic activities related to oil and gas exploration can damage the sensory organs of fish and other ocean wildlife. Since most marine mammals and fish use hearing to navigate, detect predators, find prey, and communicate, seismic testing can have profound—even fatal—effects.

Oil spills

Thousands of gallons of oil are spilled each year from OCS facilities, according to the federal government. As storms and hurricanes have intensified, the number of oil spills has increased. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita alone resulted in 125 spills of petroleum products from platforms, rigs, and pipelines on the OCS, totaling 685,000 gallons. Oil is toxic for most fish and other marine species and, according to the National Academy of Sciences, cleanup methods can only remove a small fraction of oil spilled in marine waters.

More drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf would have an insignificant impact on gas prices while damaging our beaches and coastal communities, hurting marine life, and polluting our seas. We cannot drill our way to lower gas prices or energy independence. Improved efficiency, cleaner fuels, better cars, and livable communities are real solutions to the pain Americans are feeling at the gas pump.

For more information, go to www.nrdc.org



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