



Fact Sheet on Offshore Oil Drilling

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For decades our coasts were protected from offshore oil drilling. Unfortunately, circumstances changed in 2008 when President Bush lifted a White House moratorium on offshore drilling. Congress later followed suit by allowing a federal ban on drilling to expire. Now, decision makers at the state and federal levels are examining ways to capitalize on the lifted moratoria and erect new platforms along our coastlines.

The Surfrider Foundation is opposed to offshore oil drilling in new areas. Our nation's oceans, waves and beaches are vital recreational, economic and ecological treasures that will be polluted by an expansion in offshore oil drilling. Instead of advocating for transient and environmentally harmful ways to meet America's oil needs, we should seek a comprehensive and environmentally sustainable energy plan that includes energy conservation.

Offshore oil drilling and oil spills have the potential to critically impact pristine marine ecosystems and lead to industrialization of our coastlines. While there are numerous environmental problems associated with oil drilling, there are also negative economic impacts that we simply cannot afford during hard economic times. This fact sheet is intended to outline potential impacts of offshore oil drilling, and also to dispel myths that have been put forth by oil drilling proponents.

Ultimately, America cannot drill our way out of an oil consumption problem. We must look toward sustainable solutions that protect our natural resources, rather than drilling for fossil fuels off our coasts. It is in the best interest of our environment and economy to wean America off oil, and **develop a sustainable "energy portfolio" that includes renewable sources and conservation.**

Energy conservation is the most economical and environmental way to achieve energy independence from fossil fuels. Riding mass transit, increasing auto efficiency, improving building insulation, and better management of electrical use in homes/businesses, are just a few ways we can reduce our oil and energy consumption. *Conservation is much cheaper and healthier than investing in further development of offshore oil reserves.*

It's imperative that America shifts away from an old mindset of relying on fossil fuels. Climate change, and other environmental problems are not waiting for us to 'rebuild our energy portfolio'. Oil drilling and continued use of fossil fuels will only exacerbate climate change, and keep us trapped in a 'backwards frame of mind' which overlooks sustainable energy and conservation. The answers for sustainable energy are already in front of us—and offshore drilling is not part of the answer.

Environmental Impacts

There are serious environmental impacts associated with each stage of offshore drilling. While some impacts may not be seen by the naked eye, there are a myriad of impacts that local communities and elected officials must know about **before considering new oil drilling**. Because the Surfrider Foundation is so concerned about the environmental ramifications of drilling, we have chosen to highlight the most harmful impacts for this fact sheet.

- **Oil Exploration—Seismic Surveys:** Seismic surveys are conducted to locate and estimate the size of an offshore oil reserve. In order to conduct surveys, ships use 'airgun arrays' to emit high-decibel explosive impulses in order to map the seafloor. The noise from seismic surveys can damage or kill fish eggs and larvae and impair the hearing and health of fish, making them susceptible to predators and making it challenging for them to locate prey or mates or communicate with each other. These disturbances can disrupt important migratory patterns, forcing marine life away from suitable habitats meant for foraging and mating. In addition, seismic surveys have been implicated in whale beaching and stranding incidents. ⁱ
- **Drilling and Processing Oil:** The process of drilling releases thousands of gallons of polluted water into the ocean, known as "drilling muds" (containing toxins like benzene, zinc, arsenic, radioactive materials, and other contaminants that are used to lubricate drill bits and maintain pressure); unfortunately these discharges are unregulated.ⁱⁱ High concentration of metals have been found around drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and have been shown to bio-accumulate in our food chains. ⁱⁱⁱA recent study by the PEW Charitable Trust concluded that a single oil well discharges around 1,500 – 2,000 tons of waste material. Contaminates from oil drilling can accumulate on the sea floor often smothering organisms and causing malformations, genetic damage, and mortality in fish embryos. ^{iv}

Fragile seafloor habitats are also greatly disturbed by drilling and construction of oil pipelines to transport oil back to shore. Of course, wetlands and beaches near the coasts can also be or harmed wherever pipelines run across land.

Air pollution is yet another major problem associated with drilling. Over its operational lifespan, **a single rig can pollute as much as 7,000 cars driving 50 miles per day.**^v Air pollution is also a problem at oil refineries. Just for the state of California alone, refinery emissions of greenhouse gases account for about 40% of industrial emissions and almost 10% of the state's greenhouse

gases. vi

- **Oil Spills:** As demonstrated by the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, oil spills have the potential to damage entire ecosystems. The **BP oil spill released approximately 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico**, fouling beaches and coastal wetlands from Louisiana to Florida; killing birds, fish, and marine mammals; and devastating the recreation and fishing-based coastal economies of the Gulf States. Oil spills can also take numerous years to cleanup. Nearly 20 years after the Exxon Valdez spill, more than 26 thousand gallons of oil *still remain* in the soil on the shoreline.^{vii} Sadly, oil spills take place on a consistent basis. *Each year, about 880,000 gallons of oil are sent to the ocean from U.S. drilling operations.* ^{viii}

From 1995 to 2010, the U.S. Mineral Management Service recorded 183 spills in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean (including spills of toxic chemicals related to drilling). ^{ix} The U.S. Department of the Interior also estimated that every three to four years, a spill of at least 10,000 barrels is expected to occur. ^x Natural disasters often prompt spills. When Hurricane Katrina whipped through the Gulf of Mexico, she **destroyed over 100 platforms and caused the largest oil spill in the U.S. since the Exxon Valdez.** ^{xi}

- **Onshore Environmental Impacts:** Because oil production requires massive infrastructure on land (e.g. roads, storage tanks, pipelines, processing facilities, and other facilities) *local communities can experience onshore environmental problems because of offshore drilling.* Impacts associated with infrastructure can severely damage beaches, wetlands, and coastal habitats, which directly impact local communities that rely on tourism and recreation. Oil processing plants produce massive air pollution and also utilize large amounts of freshwater to process oil. It is unfortunate that the oil industry is externalizing the costs of the air, water and land pollution at the expense of our environment and tourism.

Facts vs. Fiction

Before scrutinizing ‘oil drilling myths’, it’s important to examine economic arguments that **prove our coastal communities are the mainstay of the U.S. economy** and will undoubtedly suffer economically if new drilling occurs. The potential of catastrophic oil spills, not to mention the eyesore of an industrialized coastline, could throw our already fragile economy into a tailspin.

Nothing proves this point more than a recent study conducted by the National Ocean Economics Program showing our “ocean economy” (specifically focusing on tourism and recreation) contributes three times the amount of money to the U.S. economy, compared to offshore oil production. ^{xii}

The report defines “ocean economy” as: ocean resources that have a direct or indirect input of goods and services to an economic activity. Nearly 75% of jobs

within the “ocean economy” sector are related to coastal tourism and recreation. ^{xiii} Coastal tourism contributes significantly to the U.S. economy. Offshore drilling could put coastal economies at risk and therefore have an impact on our larger economy.

Coastal Tourism Revenue: ^{xiv}	
** Note: revenue calculations are conservative estimates based on leisure and hospitality	
<i>State</i>	<i>Dollars in the billions for the year 2007</i>
California	\$52
Florida	\$28
New York	\$31
New Jersey	\$10
Washington	\$8

In addition to tourism and recreation being impacted by drilling, fishing industries could also be disrupted and uprooted. Seismic surveys, oil rig construction, potential spills, and decommissioning activities may displace fisherman. The fishing industry is another pillar in our U.S. economy that we cannot afford to put in jeopardy.

FISHING GENERATED INCOME BY REGION ^{xv}		
<i>Region</i>	<i>Recreational Fishing</i>	<i>Commercial Fishing</i>
North Atlantic	\$3,118,208,062	\$1,146,958,000
Mid-Atlantic	\$2,067,696,210	\$238,468,000
South Atlantic	\$3,639,714,000	\$70,519,000
Pacific Northwest	\$800, 270, 867	\$323 312 000
California	\$2,282,694,375	\$129,910,000

MYTH: By expanding offshore drilling, America can wean itself off “foreign oil”.

Reality: A Congressional report from 2003 indicates that increasing offshore production would not reduce U.S. reliance on foreign oil. ^{xvi} The term “foreign oil” typically conjures up oil that is sourced from Middle East or OPEC nations. In actuality, the United States imports nearly half its oil from *non-OPEC nations*. Many people are surprised to find out that America’s receives approximately 30% of its oil from North America. In fact ***Canada and Mexico are two of the largest oil suppliers for the U.S.*** ^{xvii}

The United States is the world’s largest consumer of oil, *churning through 18.7 million barrels a day.* ^{xviii} By contrast, the United States only produces 9.1 million barrels a day ^{xix} According to the Director of the Center for Energy and Environmental Studies at Boston University, even under the most optimistic scenario, the U.S. would only produce an additional 2 to 4 million barrels a day leaving us with a import deficit. **Even with new drilling, the U.S. would still need to import 40% of its daily oil consumption.** ^{xx}

The U.S. needs a comprehensive energy plan that doesn’t contradict itself! While the U.S. imports a large amount of oil, we are also exporting our own oil. Believe it or

not, the **U.S. exports almost 2 million barrels a day of oil**. Why should we drill, if the U.S. is exporting oil? U.S. oil exports have steadily increased over the past 30 years and the trend doesn't appear to be changing anytime soon. ^{xxi}

MYTH: New offshore oil drilling will give Americans “relief at the pump”.

Reality: The U.S. Energy Information Administration (part of the Department of Energy) stated: “[drilling in] the Pacific, Atlantic, and eastern Gulf regions would **not** have a significant impact on **oil prices before 2030**”. The report continues to say: “Because oil prices are determined on the international market ... any impact on average wellhead prices is *expected to be insignificant*.” ^{xxii}

So, let's get this straight... we have to wait several years in order to experience a *small amount of relief* at the pump? And while we're waiting for “relief at the pump”, we would be harming our economy and environment by drilling. This doesn't seem like the right answer!

MYTH: Offshore drilling will help us ensure our Nation's long-term energy needs.

Reality: Even under the best-case scenario, America's offshore oil reserves **would provide us only 920 days, or 18 months, supply of oil at our current rate of consumption.** ^{xxiii} A recent study shows new drilling will not help long-term energy needs. Here's an analysis for each region:

- The North and Mid-Atlantic contain a small amount of oil. At recent prices and usage, the region contains about 2.3 billion barrels of oil.
- The South Atlantic contains an even smaller amount of oil. At recent prices, the area is estimated to contain approximately 0.31 billion barrels of oil which would supply the nation with oil for about 15 days.
- In California, at recent prices and usage, the oil available off California's coastline would supply the nation with approximately thirteen months of oil.
- In the Pacific Northwest, Washington and Oregon only have a miniscule amount of oil and would supply the nation with 15 days of oil. ^{xxiv}

This doesn't seem like “long-term” energy security.

MYTH: Advances in drilling technology have made offshore drilling “safer”.

Reality: New technology is far from safe as proven by numerous recent spills, including the latest spill off the coast of Australia. Using “state of the art” technology, flaunted by oil companies, an oil rig blew out spilling at least 400 barrels of oil per day (estimate by oil company) and could have been as much as 2,000 barrels a day (estimate by Australia Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism). That spill covered thousands of square miles of ocean and was not able to be stopped for over two months. ^{xxv}

There are claims by oil drilling proponents that “subsea drilling” can be done safely and ‘kept out of sight’. However, a recent investigative report exposed the truth that subsea drilling installations are almost entirely used in depths greater than 5,000 feet.^{xxvi} Waters in both the Atlantic and Pacific only run a few hundred feet deep. For example, in certain areas of the Pacific along the continental shelf, it’s estimated waters are approximately 650 feet.^{xxvii} Most waters off the coast of Florida run no deeper than 100 feet.^{xxviii}

We all know from experience that platforms are not safe in the face of powerful storms. This was illustrated in the Gulf of Mexico when both Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita damaged a combined total of **124 platforms and spilled 741,400 gallons of oil.**^{xxix}

MYTH: Potential economic benefits of offshore drilling “outweigh the risks”.

Reality: In most instances, risk assessments of offshore drilling fail to take into consideration the potential risk to our beaches and coastlines in terms of their functioning as economic engines. As discussed above, our coastlines are single handedly the biggest revenue generated for our economy. Our nation’s oceans, waves and beaches are vital recreational, economic and ecological treasures that will be polluted by an increase in offshore oil drilling. Why bother with such risk? Images of oiled marine life and vast amounts of oil covering the ocean have been permanently etched into our hearts and minds over the years. America needs to conserve energy, protect our natural resources and look for innovative ways to build a sustainable ‘energy portfolio’. Offshore oil drilling is not the answer.

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