

# 5 YEARS AFTER: DEEPWATER HORIZON'S LESSONS GO UNLEARNED



If the Deepwater Horizon disaster could have taught us just one thing, it's that reckless pursuit of more fossil fuel comes with major and predictable costs. (Photo: Courtesy of US Coast Guard)

Remember that helpless, infuriating feeling watching gallon after gallon of oil spew into the Gulf of Mexico in the spring and summer of 2010?

After Deepwater Horizon - the worst oil spill disaster in U.S. history - came the mantra: Never again.

But now, as we mark the fifth anniversary of BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster - which killed hundreds of thousands of dolphins, whales and other sea life, not to mention claimed the lives of 11 men and fouled hundreds of miles of oceans and beaches - I'm left wondering whether we've learned anything at all.

In fact, it seems like quite the opposite: The Obama administration has now launched new offshore oil exploration in the Gulf of Mexico and the Arctic and Atlantic oceans. Rather than heed the warnings of Deepwater Horizon, the administration seems determined to double-down on dangerous offshore drilling.

This reckless pursuit of more fossil fuel comes with major and predictable costs. In the Arctic, an oil spill would be devastating for polar bears, walrus and other wildlife - and impossible to clean up in such harsh conditions. In the Atlantic, even the seismic search for oil will injure or kill 138,000 dolphins and whales, the federal government estimates, including nine endangered North Atlantic right whales.

So what did we learn from that nauseating experience of watching the Deepwater Horizon oil flow and flow, more than 200 million gallons of thick, black crude that coated and killed hundreds of dolphins, birds and other wildlife? New [studies](#) are showing that the chemical dispersants that were used after the spill are still hurting wildlife in myriad ways that we barely understand.

Then maybe we learned better ways to address major oil spills? But we haven't, because the inescapable reality is that once we spill massive quantities of oil into sensitive ocean habitats, the damage has been done and there's no going back.

Nothing has changed except our knowledge of just how destructive a major offshore oil spill can be, and the visceral memories of watching our lifestyle translate into dead birds and dolphins.

Is the lesson, then, that massive oil spills are just the price of living in the modern age? Well, no, because over the past five years we've also learned that human-induced climate change is happening faster than we realized and with more dire consequences. The oceans that cover 75 percent of the planet will rise, they will become more acidic and carry less oxygen, and entire life-giving ecological systems will be altered in dangerous and unpredictable ways.

So then, I can't see any lessons that we've learned from Deepwater Horizon and our insatiable and reckless pursuit of new oil to burn and cook our planet with, unless it's this: leave the oil in the ground. That's where it belongs.

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