

Katrina and Rita provide glimpse of what could happen to offshore drilling if Gustav hits Gulf

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Shortly after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the U.S., Rice University civil and mechanical engineering professor Satish Nagarajaiah studied damage done to offshore drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. If tropical storm Gustav strengthens into a Category 3 hurricane, as forecasters are predicting, Nagarajaiah's findings could provide valuable knowledge about what to expect if Gustav hits the Gulf of Mexico oil platform regions.

Nagarajaiah is available to talk in greater detail about the risks to the oil industry platforms and what Americans could be paying in higher gasoline prices.

Katrina and Rita (both Category 5 storms with sustained winds of up to 175 mph) caused the following damage on an estimated 3,000 platforms and 22,000 miles of pipelines that were in the direct path of hurricanes:

- 52 platforms with major damage
- 19 of the floating drill units exposed to hurricane force winds went adrift or were damaged
- 115 platforms destroyed
- Eight rigs destroyed
- 535 pipeline segments damaged

"Predicting how much damage will occur to oil platforms and rigs is a difficult task," said Nagarajaiah. "These platforms and rigs may have sustained damage due to past storms, and like anything else, become more susceptible to threats of wind and storm surge."

The costs could be steep to an energy company.

"If one major deep-water production platform is destroyed, you're talking about a \$1 billion or more loss," Nagarajaiah said. "If it's multiple rigs and platforms in a variety of water depths, then we're talking billions of dollars."

When Katrina and Rita struck, gas prices soared as a result of damage to oil facilities. With oil prices at all-time highs this year, U.S. oil production in the Gulf of Mexico has a direct impact on gasoline prices.

Source: Rice University

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