

# Damage from BP oil spill lingers a year later

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Greenpeace activists stage a publicity event inviting members of the public to write to energy giant BP amid the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in early July, 2010. The BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig sank on April 22, two days after an explosion that killed 11 workers and which then unleashed the worst environmental disaster in US history.

The worst maritime oil spill in history began nearly a year ago with a drop in pressure in a poorly drilled well deep in the Gulf of Mexico. It hasn't really ended even though BP's runaway well was eventually capped 87 days later.

As crews in Japan struggle to contain a nuclear meltdown at a poorly maintained plant in Fukushima, the April 20 anniversary of the BP spill is a stark reminder of the high costs of our energy needs and the far-reaching consequences of cutting corners on safety.

The massive explosion killed 11 workers and sank the Deepwater Horizon [drilling rig](#), unleashing a leak that spewed 206 million gallons of oil before it was finally contained.

Hundreds of miles of fragile coastal wetlands and beaches were contaminated, a third the Gulf's rich US waters were closed to fishing, and the economic costs have reached into the tens of billions.

Months of uncertainty caused deep emotional trauma for the fishermen and [coastal residents](#) who feared their way of life was being destroyed. More than 130,000 of them are still trying to push their compensation claims through a clogged system.

"They could give me \$500 million and it wouldn't be enough," said Dean Blanchard, who used to handle as much as 500,000 pounds (226,800 kilograms) of shrimp a day at his Grand Isle, Louisiana dock.

"It's not the money, it's your life's work. It's what I love, it's what I did my whole life and they just came along and blindsided me."



An oil-soaked brown pelican captured off the Louisiana coast is cleaned at an animal rehabilitation centre. The April 20 anniversary of the BP spill serves as a stark reminder of the high costs of our energy needs and the far-reaching consequences of cutting corners on safety.

Favorable winds and currents, the location of the well -- some 50 miles (80 kilometers) off the coast of Louisiana -- and about two million gallons of chemical dispersants kept the bulk of the oil from reaching shore.

That protected fragile coastal wetlands, white sandy beaches and millions of nesting birds from the intense damage seen in Alaska after the [Exxon Valdez](#) ran aground and 11 million gallons of oil spilled from its cracked hull in 1989.

Yet the damage is certainly not negligible, nor is it over: crews are still actively cleaning 235 miles (380 kilometers) of coastline and plan to return to around 300 more miles (480 kilometers) once tourism and nesting season is over.

It's also not clear what impact the oily chemical soup which spread through hundreds of miles of Gulf waters will have on its fish, shrimp, dolphins and other marine creatures.

"The outstanding question is did we save something in the short-term to extend a problem in the long-term," said Larry McKinney, director of the Harte Research Institute for [Gulf of Mexico](#) Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

"We just don't have enough information to say one way or another."

The spill also exposed the industry's shocking lack of preparedness, weak safety culture and dangerously lax government oversight.

"This disaster was almost the inevitable result of years of industry and government complacency and lack of attention to safety," a presidential

commission tasked with investigating the spill concluded.

"As drilling pushes into ever deeper and riskier waters where more of America's oil lies, only systemic reforms of both government and industry will prevent a similar, future disaster," co-chair William Reilly said when the commission released its recommendations in January.

President Barack Obama imposed a moratorium on deepwater drilling five weeks into the spill as BP's efforts to contain the leak 5,000 feet (1.5 kilometers) below the surface failed, flow estimates rose sharply and the political fallout intensified.

The Interior Department restructured its operations -- finally separating safety and environmental enforcement from permitting and revenue generating functions -- but still lacks the expertise and the funding to properly oversee the increasingly complex offshore industry.

The moratorium was lifted in October after new safety regulations were established and the first deepwater drilling permit was issued on February 28. Activity is just now picking up, with the tenth permit issued on Friday.

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