

# Environmentalists warn of risks of Arctic drilling

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Greenpeace International executive director Kumi Naidoo, right, and Greenpeace Russian energy researcher Vladimir Chuprov, left, speak at a news conference in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, Aug. 14, 2012. Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature unveiled a report on Tuesday they have commissioned to assess risks of an oil spill in the Pechora Sea in Russia's Arctic where state-owned Gazprom is currently prospecting for oil. (AP Photo/Misha Japaridze)

(AP) — Environmental activists warned Tuesday that drilling for oil in the Russian Arctic could have disastrous consequences because of a lack of technology and infrastructure to deal with a possible spill in a remote region with massive icebergs and heavy storms.

Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund unveiled a report assessing the risks of an oil spill in the Pechora Sea in Russia's Arctic, where state-

owned Gazprom has installed a huge [drilling](#) platform and is pioneering sea drilling in the area at its Prirazlomnaya platform.

The report concludes that a sizeable spill from the platform could contaminate protected areas and nature reserves on the shore and islands within about 20 hours after a spill, while emergency teams would take at least three days to reach the area. The platform is about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from the nearest port, which is in Murmansk, a city on the extreme northwestern edge of the Russian mainland.

The report was commissioned by the two environmental organizations and compiled by an independent Moscow-based think tank.

"An oil spill in the Arctic would be virtually impossible to clean up," Greenpeace International's director, Kumi Naidoo, told a news conference.

An oil spill that releases 10,000 metric tons of oil over five days would contaminate half a million square kilometers (about 300,000 square miles) of water, the report said.

Gazprom disputed the report's assessment of the risks involved and said it is committed to safety.

Its offshore drilling subsidiary told The Associated Press in an email that the platform's design "incorporated the latest technology in offshore oil drilling" and "more than" satisfied all environmental and safety standards.

The company also said it collaborates with Russian oil company Lukoil, which has a base in the coastal town of Varrandei, 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Gazprom's oil deposit, which, if necessary, could speed up any rescue efforts significantly.

Environmentalists also insist that oil production in the Arctic is unprofitable and cannot survive without government subsidies.

"Oil companies would not be rushing to the Arctic so eagerly if it wasn't for politicians who push them to," Igor Chestin, head of WWF in Russia, said Tuesday.

Russian oil companies have only recently begun to operate in weather conditions as harsh as those found in the ice-bound Arctic, where ice ridges are meters (yards) deep and storms are frequent.

Gazprom is pioneering the oil development of Russia's sector of the [Arctic](#) and was the first Russian company to dispatch a drilling rig to the Pechora Sea in northwest Russia last year. The oil field they are prospecting holds some 6.6 million tons of oil.

Environmentalists argue that Arctic drilling is a hazard that mankind cannot afford since there are no tried and tested technologies to deal with [oil spills](#) in conditions with ice — under ice in particular.

An AP investigation last year found that at least 1 percent of Russia's annual [oil](#) production, or 5 million tons, is spilled every year. Crumbling infrastructure and a harsh climate are believed to be the main factors for the spills.

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