



**0. Deepwater Horizon: Disaster in the Gulf - Story Preface**

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Deepwater Horizon Off-shore drilling rig. Photograph online courtesy Wikipedia Commons.

*What I get is  
25,000 barrels a day  
coming out of that tiny hole -  
that's a 1.2-inch hole.*

Steve Wereley  
Associate Professor, Mechanical Engineering  
Purdue University  
Describing One of Three BP Leaks

Lying beneath the waters of the Gulf of Mexico are about 3.6 billion barrels of oil. That, at least, is the federal government's estimate.

If the Minerals Management Service is correct, the total amount of buried oil - if fully extracted - would satisfy all of America's oil needs for about ... six months.

Given those numbers, people have long debated whether offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico is worth the risk. Although rigs dot the seascape along the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, Florida has not allowed it. Tourism and fishing - both commercial and sport - drive that state's economy.

After an offshore oil rig called "Deepwater Horizon" exploded (on the 20th of April, 2010) - then sank, two days later, in a dramatic sequence of events over a four-minute period - America sustained its worst-ever oil spill.

How did such a catastrophe occur?

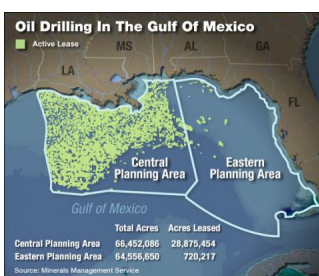
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**Media Stream**



Location of Oil Leases in the Gulf of Mexico

Image created by Alice Kreit, of National Public Radio, using data from Minerals Management Service, Department of the Interior. Image online, courtesy NPR.

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