

BP Disaster: What are we doing to the planet we call Home?

April 20, 2010 will go down in history as a day of infamy. This is the day that British Petroleum's deep ocean oil exploration drilling rig exploded, killing 11 and injuring at least 17 of the 126 workers. Over two weeks later, 210,000 gallons of crude oil a day continues to spew into the Gulf of Mexico, killing marine life and water birds, and threatening coastal areas and the fishing industry of the Gulf.

In 2008, the federal Minerals Management Service, under pressure from oil company lobbyists, exempted some drilling projects in the Gulf from filing plans for handling a major spill from an uncontrolled blowout. BP met the federal conditions for exemptions, and thus had no plan. BP made \$163 billion in profits from 2001-2009, and an additional \$5.6 billion in the first quarter of this year. However, the company decided to forgo a remote control shut off switch (required by Norway and Brazil) in order to save \$500,000 on the rig. The results of this failure are proving catastrophic.

For the past 5 years, citizens in Michigan and Minnesota have been protesting proposed metallic sulfide mining projects. Citizens have been warning about the potential contamination of watersheds for centuries to come, and about potential effects on fish populations, along with destruction of wetlands and habitat.

In Michigan, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) warned that Kennecott's mine plan was not adequate in avoiding potential collapse of the underground pillars. The report was subsequently buried and emerged only long enough for the company to claim it had "fixed" the problem. In regard to safeguarding water, Kennecott's latest "fix" is to add Styrofoam coverings over pipes and then insist that it needs no further permit from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In Minnesota, PolyMet, a Canadian company, is proposing to mine copper-nickel on U.S. Forest lands, while partially processing the metals at an old taconite site. EPA comments on the project caution that using the former taconite tailings basin for storage of new tailings holds the potential for catastrophic collapse. The EPA also warns about water quality exceedances that could last for centuries.

Despite all of these concerns—which should have literally stopped these projects in their tracks—state agencies continue to push the projects forward. This can only happen because state regulatory agencies are headed by political appointees and propelled by political agendas to increase the tax base and provide jobs for the short term, without considering harmful long term environmental effects.

The BP oil spill vividly demonstrates that (1) technology is not fail proof (2) companies will cut costs to increase profits and (3) government regulations favor industry over the environment. The recent West Virginia coal mining disaster (April 5) in which 29 workers were killed also proves that government agencies are incapable of enforcing such regulations as do exist.

On April 22 of 2010 we celebrated the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. During the past 40 years, instead of actually increasing the sustainability of this planet, we have made our way to a precipice. We are now hanging onto the edge of climate change.

We have created monstrosities of projects—including the mining of Canada's tar sands, mountain top coal removal, and the destruction of rainforests worldwide. We have gone to war over oil resources in the Middle East. We are willing to tear up wetlands and forest lands and contaminate the ground water for centuries to come in the effort to extract low grade metals to send to newly industrializing China and India. We are exploring for oil in environments where equipment failure creates catastrophic results. Mining companies have been willing to destroy plants, wildlife, and indigenous peoples in the name of profits. Monstrosities of profits. When the dinosaurs grew to such massive proportions that they could not feed themselves nor adapt to change, they became extinct.

After the BP disaster, TV viewers saw the body of a dead turtle, one that succumbed to the oil spill calamity. Indigenous peoples once believed that the Earth was created on Turtle's back. If we are going to stand up for our planet, to stand up for future generations, the time is now. There is no Plan A, B, or C to fix a planet that has reached its tipping point—that has lost its ability to sustain itself.

I urge us all to stand with Cynthia Pryor, to stand with the tribes at Eagle Rock. It's time to take back our power to connect with the Earth. It's time to stick out our necks in order to save what's left of the shell that is our home.

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Photos - BP Oil Rig Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico April, 2010

