U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up
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Round-up of Major Blogs

BP SPILL

June 17, 2010

Erich PicaPresident, Friends of the Earth
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Cleaning Up Our Politics As We Clean Up the Gulf (*Huffington Post)*

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BP's CEO Tony Hayward is testifying before Congress today, and his company's egregious record of putting workers' lives at risk and imperiling ecosystems in pursuit of steeper profits is sure to be a centerpiece of the hearing. Rightly so.

BP's bucking of safety protections and disregard for the consequences of its actions have culminated in 11 deaths and a deluge of crude that's devastating the Gulf Coast environment and the people who depend on it.

But there's more than one irresponsible company and its apparently callous CEO behind the disaster in the Gulf.

There's the Mineral Management Service's repeated rubber stamping of dangerous drilling projects without ensuring proper environmental safeguards were in place. And behind that the agency's infestation with oil industry cash and cronies, which continued to fester under the leadership of President Obama's Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

There's the drive to exploit less accessible, riskier sources of oil. And behind that the failure to reduce our nation's oil dependence with investments in clean energy and a smarter transportation system.

There are the billions in taxpayer handouts that Big Oil and the fossil fuel industry receive each year. And behind that there are the swarms of industry lobbyists choking the halls of Congress and the stacks of polluter cash filling too many politicians' campaign accounts.

Behind all of this, there's one deep-rooted problem: increasing corporate infiltration and control of our government.

Fossil fuel industry influence in Washington has perpetuated the dirty energy status quo that led to the oil spill in the Gulf. It's time for a fumigation.

Here's what needs to happen:

Give the tainted money back. Politicians should cleanse their campaign accounts of the BP and other oil money they've taken and donate it to oil spill recovery efforts. Then they should pledge to take no more.
End polluter payouts. Congress should finally eliminate all of the taxpayer subsidies that line the fossil fuel industry's pockets, perpetuate our addiction to dirty, dangerous energy, and delay the urgently needed transition to cleaner, safer alternatives.
Restore a democracy of, by and for people. The Supreme Court's decision in Citizens' United vs. Federal Election Commission gives corporate behemoths like BP, ExxonMobil, Monsanto and Goldman Sachs the right to pour unlimited cash into influencing elections. All under the guise that corporations have the same First Amendment rights as people. Congress can and should pass legislation to reverse this disaster for democracy, even if it requires a constitutional amendment. Today the organization I lead, Friends of the Earth, is launching a campaign to advance the first step: separating oil money from politics.

In just the 2008 and 2010 campaign cycles, the oil and gas industry has poured $48,401,891 into campaigns and political action committees.

We're calling on members of Congress and President Obama to donate the contaminated contributions they've accumulated in these cycles to the Gulf Coast Fund, an organization that's helping community groups across the Gulf region respond to and recover from the economic, environmental and health impacts of the oil spill as well as Hurricane Katrina. And we're inviting our more than 100,000 members and supporters -- and citizens across the country -- to join us in pressuring their representatives in Washington to come clean.

The money Big Oil pumps into our political system is not idly spent. It buys more delay in the transition to clean energy and more policies that put the interests of polluters before those of the public. Behind every corporate polluter attempt to hamstring clean energy and climate solutions, there are enabling politicians.

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), a member of the group of five House members and five senators who have taken the most money from BP in the last few years (the "BP Ten") is a case in point. She's repeatedly voted to expand dangerous drilling and give tax breaks to Big Oil. Most recently, she colluded with polluter lobbyists to spearhead a narrowly defeated attempt to eliminate the Clean Air Act as a tool to fight global warming.

Many members of the panel grilling Mr. Hayward today have also received big pots of dirty oil money. Congressman Joe Barton (R-Texas), who's spouted off about the "benefits" of climate-disrupting carbon emissions, has alone taken more than $300,000 over the past two campaign cycles. One of his counterparts in the Democratic ranks of the subcommittee, Congressman Gene Green (D-Texas), has reaped a still-not-shabby $128,000 and continues to support more offshore drilling.

The tough questions deservedly piled on Mr. Hayward today will ring hollow if committee members don't also ask this tough question of themselves: Whose interests are they serving? The public's or Big Oil's?

That's a question we'll be asking all members of Congress to answer in the coming weeks and months. If they respond to this step of treatment -- and return their tainted oil money to aid in Gulf recovery efforts -- our work will hardly be finished, but it will send a powerful message. A message that the days of corporate polluters dictating policy in Washington are on their way out. And that the days of implementing serious solutions to protect our environment, our economy, and people's health from potentially catastrophic climate change impacts are finally on their way in.

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June 17, 2010

John DoughertyDemocratic candidate for US Senate, Arizona
Posted: June 16, 2010 03:12 PM

Obama Falls Short on BP Oil Leak in Address (*Huffington Post*)

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In his first Presidential Address from the Oval Office last night, President Barack Obama missed a rare opportunity to set this nation on a fundamentally new course for regulating the oil and gas industry.

Breaking the current "fox-guarding-the-henhouse" regulatory structure is essential in meeting the President's laudable goal of creating a renewable energy-based economy.

Ending the nation's energy dependence on fossil fuels will require an adversarial regulatory structure that forces industry to fully account for the cost of producing energy, including the impacts of pollution on the health of Americans and impact on the environment.

The President stopped short in sending this crucial signal to the market place.

Obama correctly acknowledged that the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service, the agency that was supposed to be regulating BP, failed miserably.

"Over the last decade, this agency has become emblematic of a failed philosophy that views all regulation with hostility -- a philosophy that says corporations should be allowed to play by their own rules and police themselves.
"At this agency, industry insiders were put in charge of industry oversight. Oil companies showered regulators with gifts and favors, and were essentially allowed to conduct their own safety inspections and write their own regulations," Obama said.

The President's assessment of regulatory malfeasance was dead on.

His solution to the problem, however, was a capitulation to industry.

Instead of removing MMS from oversight of offshore drilling, the president simply assigned a new boss to run a failing agency.

This is a timid response to addressing a corrupt regulatory agency that is directly culpable in the nation's worst environmental disaster in history.

The president should have listened to the advice of former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, who sharply criticized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar earlier this week when Salazar first proposed keeping the disgraced MMS as the offshore oil industry's chief regulator.

Speaking on "Platts Energy Week" on Sunday, Babbitt said Salazar's proposal doesn't go far enough, likening it to "rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic." Babbitt suggested shifting oversight to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Moving oil and gas regulation to the EPA would have sent a clear signal to the industry that a fundamental shift in U.S. energy policy was under way and would have been cheered by the environmental community and renewable energy producers.

BP's recklessness and regulator's willingness to look the other way is a textbook example of government's inability to adequately control one of the world's most powerful corporations.

Now is the time for a regulatory overhaul designed to protect Americans and the environment from the short-term, profit-driven excesses of massive multinational corporations that have the power to destroy vast areas of the planet, wreck the livelihoods of millions of citizens and kill thousands of innocent people.

WATER

EPA concerned about Monsanto pollution control dam (*Huffington Post*)

JOHN MILLER | June 16, 2010 09:18 PM EST
BOISE, Idaho — Federal regulators are concerned that a dam built by Monsanto Co. earlier this year to trap phosphate mine runoff may be stopping more than just pollution.

They say the dam has also halted millions of gallons of water in Sheep Creek that would otherwise help fill the Blackfoot River.

The Environmental Protection Agency now wants the maker of Roundup herbicide to begin a costly treatment to remove selenium and heavy metals, then discharge clean water downstream, instead of capturing it in a 50-million-gallon lake behind the dam and using it for dust control on its mining roads.

The situation shows the predicament that companies like St. Louis-based Monsanto and the government face in Idaho's rich-but-polluted phosphate mining country not far from Yellowtone National Park: They must work to contain naturally occurring poisons unearthed during a century of digging, while protecting water supplies in an agricultural state hit hard by drought over the last decade.

The aim is to avoid killing streams just to save them.

"We support efforts to reduce selenium discharges to the creek, but we have serious concerns about the methods Monsanto is using, which is drying up the creek," said Mark Ryan, a federal Clean Water Act attorney for the EPA in Boise, on Wednesday. "We want to see it (the water) treated and put back into the creek where it belongs."

In 2007, the EPA warned Monsanto that selenium- and heavy metal-tainted water being flushed from the waste rock dump below the South Rasmussen Ridge Mine into Sheep Creek violated the federal Clean Water Act.

Sheep Creek runs into the Blackfoot River, and both are on the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's list of 15 waterways that exceed selenium contamination standards.

Traces of selenium are needed by most animals including humans, but the element is toxic in large amounts.

Mines owned by Monsanto, Boise-based J.R. Simplot Co., and Agrium Inc. of Canada in the so-called phosphate patch near the Idaho-Wyoming border have captured public attention since

selenium pollution began killing hundreds of livestock starting in the 1990s, including 18 cattle last August.

Monsanto got a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit in early April to erect a roughly 20-foot dam below the dump. It also has rights to the water it has trapped behind the dam.

Trent Clark, a Monsanto spokesman in Soda Springs, said Wednesday the company is seeking ways to eventually resume the flow of snowmelt and rain from its waste rock dump into Sheep Creek. He added that springs below the dam continue to flow into Sheep Creek and those meet federal clean water standards.

For now, the new dam is working to keep pollution in one place.

"None of that water is actually leaving the containment area," Clark said. "The next challenge is to find a solution that allows the free flow of the water without contaminants."

State officials said Wednesday they planned to visit the site in coming weeks to make sure Monsanto's dam doesn't significantly reduce water flows into the Blackfoot River.

"We hope this is an interim measure, and that a long-term remediation plan is yet coming," said Bruce Olenick, regional administrator in the Department of Environmental Quality's Pocatello office.