

Disaster in the gulf

In the worst environmental disaster in the history of the US thousands of gallons of oil continues to pour into the Gulf of Mexico.

1 Match the words on the left (a-d) with their definitions on the right (1-4).

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|---------------|---|
| (a) leak (v) | (1) an amount of liquid that has accidentally flowed out of its container |
| (b) spill (n) | (2) a tall structure fitted with equipment for getting oil from under the bottom of the sea |
| (c) stem (v) | (3) when liquid or gas comes out of a hole or crack |
| (d) rig (n) | (4) to stop something from spreading or increasing, especially something bad |

Definitions from or based on Macmillan English Dictionary www.macmillandictionary.com

2 Read the paragraph headings (a-d). Skim the article and match them to the correct paragraphs (1-4).

- (a) *A PR failure* (b) *Environmental concerns* (c) *Explosion on the rig* (d) *A company in crisis*

BP Oil Disaster

[1] April 20th. At 9.45 in the morning, there is an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico. Eleven platform workers are killed. Few could have foreseen what happened next. In what has officially become the largest environmental disaster in the US, the leak caused by the explosion is still releasing thousands of barrels of crude oil a day into the waters of the Gulf, more than two months after the explosion, more than two months after the explosion. BP has tried a range of measures to stem the flow of oil, but they are working at great depths out at sea and it may be several weeks before the oil can be capped.

[2] The effects of the oil spill have been devastating for the surrounding area. The fishing and tourism industries have been badly affected; marine and wildlife habitats have been damaged. For BP, things cannot get much worse. The share value of the company has plummeted; it will not be paying any dividends to its shareholders this year, given the need to finance the clean-up operation and compensation fund estimated at \$20 bn. The disaster has affected the pensions of millions of people whose funds are invested in BP.

[3] The company has been criticised harshly. One survivor of the disaster claimed that the oil rig's safety equipment had been leaking before it exploded. So, did the company put profits before safety? BP seemed slow in recognizing the seriousness of what happened - their initial estimates of the scale of the leak were much smaller than the actual volume of oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico. The company appeared less than sympathetic to those affected by the crisis, making this a public relations disaster even before the CEO was hauled before a US committee bent on assigning blame.

[4] All the major oil companies have, at some time or other, been accused of making huge profits and ignoring any damage caused to the environment. Deepwater drilling, once prohibitively expensive, is a sign that companies like BP are drilling deeper and further out to sea to try and reach oil, and taking ever-increasing risks. Environmentalists continue to protest. In the wake of this disaster, should we be thinking about moving beyond the 'oil age' and start to invest realistic amounts of money in developing alternative energy sources?

3 Read the complete article. Summarise the key events of the disaster. Why has the company been criticised?

4 Decide if the words below are nouns (N), verbs (V) or both (B).

leak	explosion	barrel	range	spill
plummet	fund	invest	equipment	estimate
pour	blame	drill	sign	risk

5 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- Who do you think is responsible for this disaster? Are these kinds of incidents inevitable?
- Who do you think should pay for cleaning up the damage to the environment? Explain your answer.
- Should there be a global initiative to use less oil in the future? What realistic alternatives are there?