



Deepwater Horizon Blowout: This is What the End of the Oil Age Looks Like

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on May 26, 2010 - 7:23am

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Tags: [deepwater horizon](#), [oil spill](#), [richard heinberg](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This is a guest post by Richard Heinberg that was previously published by the [Post Carbon Institute](#).

Lately I've been reading the excellent coverage of the Deepwater Horizon Gulf oil spill at www.TheOilDrum.com, a site frequented by veteran oil geologists and engineers. A couple of adages from the old-timers are worth quoting: "Cut corners all you want, but never downhole," and, "There's fast, there's cheap, and there's right, and you get to pick two."



There will be plenty of blame to go around, as events leading up to the fatal rig explosion are sorted out. Even if efforts to plug the gushing leak succeed sooner rather than later, the damage to the Gulf environment and to the economy of the region will be incalculable and will linger for years if not decades.

The deadly stench from oil-soaked marshes—as spring turns to hot, fetid summer—will by itself ruin tens or hundreds of thousands of lives and livelihoods. Then there's the loss of the seafood industry: we're talking about more than the crippling of the economic backbone of the region; anyone who's spent time in New Orleans (my wife's family all live there) knows that the people and culture of southern Louisiana are literally as well as figuratively composed of digested crawfish, shrimp, and speckled trout. Given the historic political support from this part of the country for offshore drilling, and for the petroleum industry in general, this really amounts to sacrificing the faithful on the altar of oil.

But the following should be an even clearer conclusion from all that has happened, and that is still unfolding: This is what the end of the oil age looks like. The cheap, easy petroleum is gone; from now on, we will pay steadily more and more for what we put in our gas tanks—more not just in dollars, but in lives and health, in a failed foreign policy that spawns foreign wars and military occupations, and in the lost integrity of the biological systems that sustain life on this planet.

The only solution is to do proactively, and sooner, what we will end up doing anyway as a result of resource depletion and economic, environmental, and military ruin: end our dependence on the stuff. Everybody knows we must do this. Even a recent American president (an oil man, it should be noted) admitted, "America is addicted to oil." Will we let this addiction destroy us, or will we overcome it? Good intentions are not enough. Now is the moment for the President, other elected officials at all levels of government, and ordinary citizens to make this our central priority as a nation. We have hard choices to make, and an enormous amount of work to do.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/us/).