

Shell's Oil Spill Response Plan

America's Arctic Ocean is home to one-fifth of the world's threatened polar bears, as well as seals, migratory birds, endangered bowhead whales, several other species of whales, Pacific walrus and much more. It is also home to the Inupiat – who spend weeks at a time on the water, hunting to feed their families and their communities. The Arctic Ocean is their garden.

Shell is pushing forward with its most risky and aggressive plans yet to drill in America's Arctic Ocean – despite the fact that there is no effective way to clean up an oil spill in the Arctic's extreme, chaotic and remote conditions. The nearest Coast Guard station is more than 1,000 miles away and both of the Coast Guard's heavy icebreakers are currently out of commission. But, there are more concerns for America's Arctic Ocean – Shell's plans are full of blatant inadequacies and falsehoods.



Photo credit: Pamela Miller

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Shell's Inadequacies:

- * **Shell plans include a glorified mop and bucket brigade** to clean up a spill in the Arctic, where icebergs can be as tall as apartment buildings and seas are prone to hurricane-force storms.
- * **Shell's equipment has never been tested in the Arctic conditions** of the Chukchi or Beaufort Seas. This includes the containment dome, which proved critical in the BP spill in the Gulf.
- * **Shell promises to build a new containment structure** to collect oil from a leaking well, but gives no information regarding the system, how or when it could be deployed, or the availability of trained personnel capable of implementing this system. Instead, Shell wants the government to approve drilling first without any indication or testing that this system will work or that Shell can deploy this novel technology without exacerbating an oil spill. As U.S. Coast Guard Retired Admiral Thad Allen astutely explained during a recent congressional hearing, "the worst time to do [research and development] is during an oil spill."
- * **Shell says it can burn off oil even in ice and slush ice conditions.** In Norway's Arctic, burning is not used because of its limited effectiveness (ice can severely hamper burning because the oil gets trapped underneath ice and in its cracks and crevices) and because of its serious impacts on air pollution.
- * **Shell plans to use two drill ships** simultaneously in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas that are **outdated and not ready** to operate in Arctic conditions.

Shell's Falsehoods:

- * **Shell's plans assume the oil giant will recover 90 percent** of the oil spilled in the open water, which is virtually impossible. In broken ice conditions, the amount of oil that could be cleaned up using mechanical recovery techniques is estimated at a mere 1 to 20 percent, according to a recent USGS report on the Arctic. Recovery rates for the Deepwater Horizon spill were 3 percent, and for the Exxon Valdez spill were 8-9 percent.

- * **Shell submitted a “worst case” oil spill plan that is based on conditions in the Arctic on August 1**, when the Arctic is virtually free of sea-ice, temperatures are above freezing, there are no sustained periods of darkness and storms are rare. Shell’s worst case scenario is based on the Arctic’s best conditions.
- * **Shell plans to drill until October 31, when cleanup efforts would likely be impeded by ice** 100 percent of the time. And, with the week to 18 days it would take for response vessels to arrive on sight, and the 39 to 74 days it would take to drill a relief well, any spill occurring well before October could mean cleanup would be pushed into the nine months when sea ice is prevalent in the Arctic.
- * In fact, **Shell admits that it cannot safely or effectively respond to any spill that occurs more than 21 days** into the Arctic drilling season. Their answer to this problem? Leave the spilled oil until spring comes and the ice thaws. This “leave in place” plan is no plan at all.

The Bottom Line:

Shell simply is not ready for exploration activities in the Arctic Ocean – the lack of infrastructure, technology and know-how, training, and realistic plans reflect a serious lack of readiness. We cannot standby and let Shell Oil implement its risky and dirty plans to mar one of our greatest natural treasures.

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