

Background Knowledge: Oil Spills

In today’s world, there are a variety of environmental concerns such as the loss of the rainforests, desertification and global warming. Environmental **disasters** not only happen on land, but they also occur in gulfs, seas and oceans. A human activity that greatly impacts these bodies of water are oil spills.

An oil spill is a release of liquid **petroleum** into a **marine ecosystem**. Unfortunately, it is a very **toxic** and damaging form of pollution. Oil spills happen for a variety of reasons, but they are frequently caused by accidents involving **tankers, drilling rigs, pipelines** and storage facilities. Although natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can damage **equipment**, it is often the oil corporations themselves who cause the most damage. This is because some of these corporations do not always **maintain** their pipelines, rigs and tankers properly. Another reason is that corporations in the oil industry are sometimes **careless** in their operations. For example, in 1989 an oil tanker called Exxon Valdez struck a reef near Alaska and released millions of gallons of oil into the environment. ExxonMobil further failed by not acting quickly enough to contain the spill.

Oil spills are a significant environmental issue because they threaten human and animal life and have a negative effect on local resources. Because the chemicals in oil have toxins, they are poisonous to marine ecosystems such as marshes and small trees known as **mangroves**, in addition to many kinds of marine wildlife. Not only does the oil kill fish and shellfish, but it also kills many types of marine birds as well as large numbers of turtles, otters, seals, dolphins, sharks and whales.

In addition to harming the marine environment and its animals, oil spills have a negative impact on those who depend on a healthy marine economy. For example, oil spills can destroy local fishing industries and **aquaculture** businesses.

Deepwater Horizon: The Oil Spill that Destroyed an Ecosystem

British Petroleum (BP) is a multi-national oil and gas company which is one of the largest energy corporations in the world. Since its founding in 1908, BP has grown to 74,500 employees and been ranked as a Fortune Global 500 corporation for 23 years (Fortune Global, n.d.). Moreover, it is currently ranked 12th in the world for its revenue turnover. Despite these achievements, BP has caused a number of environmental disasters in the last ten years. This is because of problems with BP’s oil equipment and pipeline leaks. This kind of corporate carelessness led to a terrible explosion on April 20th, 2010 on an oil rig called the Deepwater Horizon, which caused one of the worst oil spills in history.



Pre-video Tasks:

1. In which ways do oil spills harm life in the ocean?

.....

2. How do oil spills affect beaches and coastal activities?

.....

3. Subject-relevant vocabulary (*Provide definitions, translations and synonyms where possible.*)

Aquaculture	
Careless	
Disaster	
Drilling rig	
Equipment	
Maintain	
Mangrove	
Marine ecosystem	
Petroleum	
Pipeline	
Tanker	
Toxic	

Video Comprehension Questions

Watch the CBS News video: https://youtu.be/CtUW_2-q71U

- 1. How many years ago did the news story occur?
- 2. How many people were killed in the accident?
- 3. Why was this oil spill in Louisiana so significant?
- 4. How many gallons of crude were released into the ocean?
- 5. When was the oil spill from the pipeline finally stopped?

00:34

- 6. In general, which animals have been impacted by the oil spill?
- 7. According to an expert from the National Wildlife Federation, which island plants have been damaged by the oil spill?
- 8. How much of the island has been lost because of the oil spill?
- 9. What does David Muth believe will happen to the island in two years?

01:45

- 10. Besides coral and starfish, what other species was hurt by the spill?
- 11. How many did researchers find stranded on beaches?
- 12. How much money has BP spent trying to restore the environment?
- 13. Which government body is testing seafood to ensure that it is safe to eat?
.....
- 14. How long do local fishermen think it will take to restore the Gulf region?
.....

Post-video Questions

1. Generally speaking, who takes responsibility for oil spills? Is it enough that they do so?

.....
.....

2. How could a disastrous oil spill like the one caused by Deepwater Horizon be prevented from happening in the future? (*Think of two or three ways.*)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. How would you write the in-text citations for the two references below?

(a) (b)

4. From what you've learned in the pre-reading and video, what do you predict will be the midterm examination writing prompt? (*Please write two or three possibilities.*)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

References

CBS Evening News. (2012, April 20). *Lingering effects, two years after the oil spill*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBF-43--ptA>

Fortune Global 500. (n.d.). *Global 500 List*. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/global500/bp/>