

VIDEO: BP'S Criminal Negligence

Despite Knowing It Had a Damaged Blowout Preventer, BP STILL Cut Corners By Removing the Single Most Important Safety Measure

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Several weeks before the Gulf oil explosion, a key piece of safety equipment – the blowout preventer – was damaged.

As the Times of London [reports](#):

Mike Williams, the chief electronics technician on the Deepwater Horizon, and one of the last workers to leave the doomed rig] claimed that the blowout preventer was then damaged when a crewman accidentally moved a joystick, applying hundreds of thousands of pounds of force. Pieces of rubber were found in the drilling fluid, which he said implied damage to a crucial seal. But a supervisor declared the find to be “not a big deal”, Mr Williams alleged.

UC Berkeley engineering professor Bob Bea told 60 Minutes that a damaged blowout preventer not only may lead to a catastrophic accident like the Gulf oil spill, but leads to inaccurate pressure readings, so that the well operator doesn't know the real situation, and cannot keep the rig safe.

Bea also said that – despite the damage – BP ordered the rig operator to ignore an even more critical safety measure. Specifically, BP ordered the rig operator to remove the “drilling mud” – a heavy liquid used to keep oil and gas from escaping – before the well was sealed.

According to Bea, the accident would not have occurred had drilling mud been used.

The importance of drilling mud is well-known. [For example](#):

Frank Patton, a drilling engineer for the government's Mineral Management Service, which oversees offshore drilling, told a separate inquiry in Kenner, La., that drilling mud “is the most important thing in safety for your well.”

And numerous eyewitnesses have confirmed that drilling mud was removed too early.

For example, as the Times-Picayune [reports](#):

Bickford's client, who was working immediately next to the drill floor at the time of the explosion, claims the rig operators had already started pumping mud out of the riser....

“We had set the bottom cement plug,” the [whistleblower] said. “At that point the BOP stack, the blowout preventer, was tested. I don’t know the results of that test. However, it must have passed because at that point they elected to displace the marine riser from the vessel to the sea floor. They displaced all the mud out to the riser preparing to unlatch from the well two days later. So they displaced it with sea water.”

Bickford said his client saw mud being pumped out of the riser and onto boats that normally collect the mud in tanks. Another lawyer, Stuart Smith, said he represents fishermen who witnessed the explosion and saw the mud being extracted beforehand.

Other lawsuits by rig workers paint a similar picture. Bill Johnson, a Transocean deck pusher with 35 years of experience on oil rigs, was injured in the explosion and has sued his employer, BP, Halliburton and others in Galveston County, Texas. Johnson’s attorney, Kurt Arnold of Houston, said Johnson had a meeting with a BP supervisor about 10 hours before the explosion and was told “things were plugged in the well and good to go. He thinks in retrospect the company man was not following procedure.”

Another one of Arnold’s clients, roustabout Nick Watson, said mud came back up the hole so suddenly before the explosion that he was trying to wipe it away from his eyes on the deck when the power went out and the first explosion came, Arnold said.

If the final cement plug wasn’t in place yet, removing the mud would be at odds with “good oil-field practice” outlined in 2003 by the federal Minerals Management Service. The MMS report, prepared by WEST Engineering Services, warns against single-point failures — counting on one mode of protection — by saying that “mud weight is the first round of defense against a kick, followed up by” the blowout preventer. Removing the mud left the blowout preventer as the only failsafe.

“To displace mud above the position of the upper plug with water before setting the upper plug means that you are relying on one barrier for the duration; this is not good,” said a deepwater drilling expert who did not want to be identified because he does business with BP. The expert is not involved in the Deepwater Horizon project.

And as McClatchy [reported](#) on May 11th:

Investigators on Tuesday homed in on whether an uncommon sequence of events involving a decision to remove heavy drilling lubricants early from a pipeline may have triggered the sudden upwelling of gas that led to the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig.

Anthony Gervaso, the engineer aboard a supply ship that was parked near the rig when it exploded, told a Coast Guard inquiry in Kenner, La., that he’d learned from his captain that rig workers pulled from the water had said they’d just start removing the drilling lubricant from the well when gas shot up the pipe and exploded.

Tim Probert, an executive of Halliburton, the subcontractor responsible for placing a cement plug in the well, told senators in Washington that the dense drilling fluid had been pulled from the drilling tube and replaced with much lighter seawater before a cement plug had been set to block gas and oil from coming up the pipeline.

Normally, the procedure would have been to place the plug and then switch out the drilling fluid for sea water. But he said the decision to reverse the process came at the instigation of BP, the well's owner.

The switch, he said, was "in accordance with the requirements of the well owner's well construction plan."

The drilling fluid is commonly called mud, but it is a complex and expensive recipe of clay and minerals that is recovered from a well and recycled....

Before a cement plug is installed, muds are the most important and effective way to restrict gasses and fluids held under pressure deep underground.

Probert, asked whether the practice was an unusual sequence of events, told Sen. Jeff Session, R-Ala., that he couldn't answer that question, but that it had "been used on multiple occasions in the Gulf of Mexico."

As for who was responsible for determining whether it was a normal sequence of events, both Probert and Steven Newman, the CEO of Transocean, which owned the rig, said it would have been up to BP as the well owner to have conversations with MMS about that.

"As the lease operator and the well owner, that falls on BP," Newman said.

McKay declined to address the issue of why the decision was made to pull the drilling lubricants early. He said BP knows there were unusual pressure test readings prior to the explosion but that he was not familiar with "the individual procedure on that well."

Asked by Sessions whether a blowout would have been less likely if the mud had not been removed, he responded: "I don't know. I don't know."

And see [this](#).

As Jed Lewison [points out](#):

One important implication of this report: BP's \$75 million liability cap for economic damages does not apply if the company is guilty of willful negligence, and if last night's 60 Minutes report on the disaster is accurate, BP will certainly be on the hook for everything.

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