

June 30, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We, the undersigned 60 organizations, representing fishing businesses, conservationists, unions, outdoor enthusiasts, social service organizations, faith-based organizations, small businesses, and neighborhood communities are writing to acknowledge the Bureau of Ocean Energy's (BOE) (formerly Minerals Management Service) decision to conduct an investigation into British Petroleum's (BP) apparent lack of necessary operating documents for its Atlantis Oil and Natural Gas Platform, located more than 150 miles from New Orleans. We want to make sure, however, that BOE get its investigation right and that any recommendations from the investigation be implemented immediately to avoid another horrific tragedy from befalling the Gulf of Mexico. To that end, BOE must insist on interviewing the whistleblower who risked a career to bring attention to this matter.

Since April 20th, we have witnessed the human tragedy and terrible consequences of what can happen when worker safety, technology, and apparently government oversight fails to keep pace with the challenges of going farther and farther and deeper and deeper in search of oil and natural gas along the Outer Continental Shelf.

If Atlantis had an accident, the effects would make the current situation in the Gulf look mild by comparison. In just two days, a worse case scenario spill from Atlantis would dump 12 million gallons of oil into the Gulf, eclipsing the 10.8 million gallons of oil from the Exxon Valdez. It could threaten worker health and safety and the entire Gulf Coast, which is still recovering from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina, not to mention the tragedy that is compounded every day by the Horizon accident.

In March 2009, a whistleblower notified MMS that BP did not have the proper engineer-approved documents for its subsea components before Atlantis started production in October 2007. Without these documents in place, Atlantis workers are without critical information needed on how to operate, maintain, and inspect the world's deepest oil and natural gas platform with subsea components reaching over a mile below the surface. The parallels with the Horizon accident are evident: following the accident, BP began examining and testing its blowout preventers across the suite of its platforms because the blowout preventer on the Horizon platform may have been configured differently than how it was manufactured.

Analysis of the whistleblower's claims about Atlantis by an industrial process safety engineer found that over 85 percent of the subsea piping and instrument documents and over 95 percent of the subsea welding specifications have no final engineer approval. An engineer review of BP's database concluded that BP Atlantis should be shut down immediately until the engineer-approved documents are accounted for and can be independently verified. More worrisome is an August 2008 BP communication acknowledging that "catastrophic Operator errors" could result from turning over incomplete documents.

We are concerned that the increased risk of catastrophic operator errors could lead to an accident that could harm platform workers and threaten public health, the marine environment, and local fishing communities, a story that is currently playing out in the Gulf.

As evidenced by the Horizon accident, we have witnessed the devastating impact of oil on our wildlife, environment, fishing, tourism, and way of life. Our community can scarcely afford any additional assault such as an accident at BP Atlantis.

BOE should examine whether the platform presently possesses a complete and accurate set of certified engineering documents for the entire project, including the subsea portions of the project. If the company now indicates that it has the required documentation, we ask that BOE obtain copies and have them verified by independent experts, and not by experts hired by BP.

Sincerely,

Robert Hastings, Conservation
Chair
Sierra Club - AL
Prattsville AL

Katie Shaddix, Director Assistant
Alabama Rivers Alliance
Birmingham AL

Katie Tripp, Director of Science
and Conservation
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Dia Hurt, Owners
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Rick & Jen Cox, Owners
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Penny Burbank, Coordinator
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Natasha Boyd, Executive Director
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cc: Michael R. Bromwich, Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy