

Offshore Oil Drilling Fact Sheet

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Offshore oil and gas drilling is the commercial extraction and production of oil and gas from beneath the ocean seafloor. This fact sheet reviews the significant environmental harm caused by offshore drilling; the risks and impacts to the U.S. economy and communities; and why new drilling is not needed to secure our energy supply.

Environmental Impacts

There are serious environmental impacts associated with each stage of offshore oil and gas development.

Oil Exploration: Before drilling begins, industry surveys saturate the ocean with devastating noise pollution to locate and estimate the size of offshore oil reserves.

[Seismic blasting](#) emits loud explosions that harm and can kill fish and marine mammals, while interfering with their hearing, communication, navigation, and feeding.

Oil Drilling: The routine operations of offshore drilling releases thousands of gallons of “drilling muds” that [pollute the ocean](#) with heavy metals, petroleum derivatives and other toxins. Drilling also pollutes the air through the release of harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

Oil Spills: Oil spills are an inevitable part of offshore drilling and can damage entire ecosystems and communities. Since 1969, at least [48 large oil spills](#) (over 10,000 barrels or 420,000 gallons) have occurred in U.S. waters. Hurricanes and other natural disasters [can also cause](#) major oil spills.

Processing and Transportation: Oil production requires onshore infrastructure for storage, processing, and transportation, resulting in pipelines and petrochemical plants built in coastal areas and frontline communities. Oil production also contributes to plastic pollution as over [99% of plastics](#) are made up of chemicals derived from fossil fuels.

Environmental Justice: Onshore refineries pollute the air with carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and other toxins, threatening public health and [disproportionately impacting](#) lower-income and communities of color. The oil industry also contributes to the [extensive loss of coastal wetlands](#), leaving communities more vulnerable to flooding and extreme weather.

Climate Change: The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the U.S. is [burning fossil fuels](#). Offshore oil and gas drilling releases billions of metric tons of carbon, exacerbating climate change and fueling increasing heat, hurricanes, floods, droughts, wildfires, rising seas, and ocean acidification.

Economic Impacts

Offshore drilling is an existential threat to our nation’s coastal recreation, tourism, and fishing industries that generate billions of dollars for the U.S. economy. These industries depend on a clean and healthy coastal and ocean environment and provide around [3.3 million jobs and \\$250 billion in GDP](#).

Ocean tourism and recreation provide [nearly ten times](#) the amount of jobs than the offshore oil industry. Even in the Gulf of Mexico, where most offshore drilling occurs, the ocean-dependent sectors of tourism, recreation, and fishing of every Gulf state, except Texas, provide the largest [employment contributions](#).

More Offshore Drilling Is Not Needed

New offshore drilling is not needed to ensure our nation’s energy supply. The U.S. hit an [all-time high of domestic oil production in 2024](#) without opening any new federal lands or waters for leasing. As a net oil exporter since 2020, the U.S is energy independent and we have the technology to transition to a clean energy economy.

The oil and gas industry already has more than [12 million acres](#) of federal waters under lease, and [less than 20%](#) of that acreage has started producing oil as of December 2024. Oil and gas companies have already stockpiled nearly [1,806 unused leases](#) that they can use to drill at any time they choose.

OCEAN RECREATION & TOURISM: U.S. ECONOMIC DATA			
U.S. REGION	EMPLOYMENT	WAGES	GDP
Florida	396,129	\$12,335,741,187	\$25,993,684,790
South-Atlantic	316,130	\$9,349,466,557	\$20,674,902,998
Mid-Atlantic	487,242	\$16,041,653,903	\$36,846,894,964
Northeast	166,812	\$5,250,969,896	\$11,671,869,901
Gulf of Mexico	332,623	\$9,090,687,547	\$19,235,869,934
California	343,137	\$11,737,762,084	\$23,925,676,004
Pacific Northwest	19,934	\$574,700,903	\$1,170,259,506

Value Added by Ocean Tourism and Recreation Industries. Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contributions in 2021 for select U.S. states and regions. [National Ocean Economics Program](#) 2025.

