

BP to Plead Guilty to Criminal Charges in Worker Deaths in Gulf Explosion



In April 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico killed 11 workers and caused extensive environmental harm to the region.

On Nov. 15, 2012, [BP and the US Attorney General](#) announced that the oil company had agreed to pay \$4.5 billion in fines and other penalties and plead guilty to 14 criminal charges. The company also agreed to submit to four years of government monitoring of its safety practices and ethics. (The [final report on the incident](#) was very critical of the company's OHS program, practices and culture.)

But the case isn't over. In an unusual turn, the government filed criminal charges against three BP employees:

- The top officers on the drilling rig, Robert Kaluza and Donald Vidrine, were charged with multiple counts of manslaughter for each worker killed based on the argument that they were negligent in supervising tests to seal the well
- David Rainey, a former VP, was charged with obstruction of Congress and making false statements for understating the rate at which oil was spilling from the well.

Ironically, a day after this settlement was announced, there was a fire on another oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico

that started while workers were using a torch to cut an oil line. Four workers suffered extensive burns. Two workers were initially missing; the body of one has since been found.

Clearly, safety in the oil and gas industry, and especially on offshore oil platforms, continues to be a big issue'and not just in the US.

For example, the federal government is still considering whether a separate offshore safety agency in Newfoundland and Labrador would be best for oil workers. The province has been supportive of safety oversight separate from the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board.

And the former head of a probe into offshore helicopter safety recently said there's no need for night flights to remote oil sites off Newfoundland, adding that workers should be allowed to refuse to take them without penalty. According to experts, the survival rate when a helicopter ditches at night falls to about 40% overall, 30% lower than during the day.

Here's a [special report](#) on responding to environmental emergencies, such as extensive oil spills.