

BP report whitewashes oil disaster

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10 September 2010

BP this week published the results of a four-month long internal investigation into the Deepwater Horizon disaster that killed 11 workers and caused the worst environmental disaster in US history. The report is little more than a self-serving whitewash of the events leading up to the disaster that seeks to place the bulk of the blame for the blowout on Transocean and Halliburton, the other corporations involved with the Deepwater Horizon rig.

BP's purpose is to deny its criminal negligence in the lead-up to the disaster by presenting the blowout as resulting from an anomalous series of human errors and technical problems for which other corporate interests are primarily responsible.

In so doing, BP has a direct financial interest. Should the company be found criminally negligent it could face fines of \$4,300 for every barrel of oil spilled into the Gulf, three times as much as the fine if it is found to have been accidental. The difference would amount to billions of dollars.

In fact there is overwhelming evidence that the Deepwater Horizon disaster was caused by BP's willful disregard of worker safety and environmental concerns for the sake of profit. Such brazen negligence is itself the end result of deregulation of the oil industry, policies pushed by both Republican and Democratic administrations for decades. This was, in the fullest sense, a disaster waiting to happen.

Instead BP presents the disaster as largely a technical issue, concluding that "a complex and interlinked series of mechanical failures, human judgments, engineering design, operational implementation and team interfaces came together to allow the initiation and escalation of the accident." It dares not ask how such a "complex and interlinked" series of mistakes was possible.

The report instead presents eight key findings that encompass the series of mistakes which led to the blowout. Among these are "indications of potential

weaknesses in the testing regime and maintenance management system" of the failed blowout preventer, the misinterpretation of pressure test results by Transocean workers, "weaknesses in cement design and testing, quality assurance and risk assessment," and failures in a containment device known as a "shoe track."

These "findings" add nothing new. They are really just categories or headings for organizing the dozens of breakdowns and mistakes that took place.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the dangerous decisions leading up to the blowout resulted from established BP policy or perhaps even from high-ranking officials. Unsurprisingly, the report simply ignores this. In all cases, only the actions of on-site rig workers are called into question.

BP's findings immediately drew protests from Transocean, the company which owned and operated the Deepwater Horizon rig leased by BP, and from Halliburton, the company responsible for cement work on the rig.

Lou Colasuonno, a spokesman for Transocean, rejected any suggestion that his company's maintenance of the blowout preventer was inadequate, saying the BOP was "inspected, tested and went through a rigorous maintenance schedule prior to being placed on the Macondo well and was then tested weekly, right up until 72 hours prior to the blast."

"Any statement to the contrary," he added, "is false." Representatives of Halliburton said the report contained "substantial omissions and inaccuracies."

Transocean redirected blame for the disaster onto BP's well design. "In both its design and construction, BP made a series of cost-saving decisions that increased risk," Transocean asserted. In the report, BP maintains its well construction did not contribute to the disaster.

Internal BP documents released in May, however,

reveal the company was concerned about its well design as far back as June 2009. A senior engineer with the company warned executives that month that the well casing could potentially collapse under the high pressure of the depths in which BP was drilling. Special permission had to be secured in order to proceed with the well because the casing design violated the company's own safety guidelines.

BP's report simply ignores substantial evidence that it disregarded warnings and proceeded drilling with a poor design structure and faulty equipment.

To be sure, both Transocean and Halliburton bear responsibility for the Deepwater Horizon disaster along with BP. These corporations challenge BP's findings only to defend their own financial interests. But it is simply not credible that operations carried out by Transocean and Halliburton on the Deepwater Horizon rig would have taken place without BP's knowledge or approval.

So dubious are its findings that the BP study is prefaced with a number of significant qualifications designed to provide the oil giant with sufficient wiggle room should any of its assertions be addressed in a courtroom.

"At times," says the report, "the evidence available to the investigation team was contradictory, unclear or uncorroborated. The investigation team did not seek to make credibility determinations in such cases. In evaluating the information available to it, the investigation team used its best judgment but recognizes that others could reach different conclusions or ascribe different weight to particular information."

Put another way, the BP study picked and chose from among the evidence to realize the conclusions it wanted.

BP also admits that investigators have no record of any of the interviews the report relies on for much of its "evidence." In the course of its investigation, the team, led by BP safety officer Mark Bly, "did not record or produce verbatim transcripts of any interviews, nor did the team ask interviewees to review or endorse the notes taken by the interview team members." This admits the possibility that BP could simply have made up whatever they wanted their witnesses to say.

No credible investigation of the Gulf oil disaster can be carried out by the corporation most directly responsible for it. Neither can government

investigations such as the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, set up by the Obama administration in order to cover up the causes of the blowout and provide deep-sea oil drilling a clean bill of health.

A real settling of accounts will require an investigation wholly independent of both the oil industry and its pliant government representatives. Such an investigation should have as its object the appropriation of hundreds of billions of dollars from the responsible parties in order to make whole displaced and injured workers and restore the environment of the Gulf Coast.



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