

111TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 5666

To amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to require the drilling of emergency relief wells, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 1, 2010

Mr. GRAYSON introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to require the drilling of emergency relief wells, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Emergency Relief Well
5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds that—

8 (1) the April 20, 2010, explosion and sinking of
9 the mobile offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon
10 resulted in the largest release of petroleum in the

1 history of the United States, causing tens of billions
2 of dollars in economic damages and widespread dev-
3 astation of natural resources;

4 (2) numerous attempts over several months
5 failed to stem the flow of oil from the Deepwater
6 Horizon incident, including the use of—

7 (A) a containment dome to cover the leak;

8 (B) a top kill procedure to plug the well
9 with viscous drilling fluid;

10 (C) a junk shot to clog the well with var-
11 ious waste materials; and

12 (D) a cut and cap procedure to excise a
13 damaged riser pipe and apply an oil collection
14 device;

15 (3) all of the attempts described in paragraph
16 (2) failed to permanently stop the flow of oil;

17 (4) drilling emergency relief wells is the most
18 effective procedure to permanently stop the flow of
19 oil from a damaged well;

20 (5) the success of relief wells in stopping oil
21 spills has been demonstrated in the Ixtoc Spill in
22 Mexico in 1979 and the Montara Spill in Australia
23 in 2009, which were 2 of the largest oil spills in re-
24 cent history;

1 (6) although emergency relief wells successfully
2 stopped the Ixtoc and Montara spills, the emergency
3 relief wells—

4 (A) took several months to complete; and

5 (B) required multiple successive attempts
6 before finally stopping the flow of oil;

7 (7) other governments have maintained emer-
8 gency relief well policies to ensure that preparations
9 are made for emergency relief wells before an emer-
10 gency blowout;

11 (8) although no measure can prevent a spill or
12 leak or make drilling safe, relief wells are the most
13 proven way of stopping a spill or leak after a spill
14 or leak has occurred; and

15 (9) if emergency wells had been prepared at the
16 mobile offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon at
17 the initiation of drilling, months of disaster relief
18 measures could have been eliminated, and tens of
19 millions of gallons of oil could have been prevented
20 from entering the Gulf of Mexico and damaging the
21 surrounding economies and natural resources.

1 **SEC. 3. AMENDMENTS TO THE OUTER CONTINENTAL**
2 **SHELF LANDS ACT.**

3 (a) GEOLOGICAL AND GEOPHYSICAL EXPLO-
4 RATIONS.—Section 11 of the Outer Continental Shelf
5 Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1340) is amended—

6 (1) in subsection (c)(3)—

7 (A) in subparagraph (C), by striking
8 “and”;

9 (B) by redesignating subparagraph (D) as
10 subparagraph (E); and

11 (C) by inserting after subparagraph (C)
12 the following:

13 “(D) a plan for drilling at least 1 emer-
14 gency relief well concurrently with the drilling
15 of the proposed well; and”;

16 (2) in subsection (e), by adding at the end the
17 following:

18 “(3) EMERGENCY RELIEF WELL.—Any explor-
19 atory drilling conducted under a lease shall be ac-
20 companied by the concurrent drilling of at least 1
21 emergency relief well, subject to any applicable re-
22 quirements established by the Secretary.

23 “(4) ALTERNATIVE MEASURES.—The Secretary,
24 in consultation with the Administrator of the Envi-
25 ronmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of
26 Commerce, may require, as an alternative to the

1 emergency relief well requirement under paragraph
2 (3), measures that the Secretary, after a period of
3 notice and public comment, determines would be at
4 least as effective at stopping a major release from a
5 proposed well as the measures required under that
6 paragraph.”.

7 (b) OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUC-
8 TION.—Section 25 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands
9 Act (43 U.S.C. 1351) is amended—

10 (1) in subsection (c)—

11 (A) by redesignating paragraphs (5) and
12 (6) as paragraphs (6) and (7), respectively; and

13 (B) by inserting after paragraph (4) the
14 following:

15 “(5) a plan for drilling at least 1 emergency re-
16 lief well concurrently with the proposed well;” and

17 (2) by adding at the end the following:

18 “(m) EMERGENCY RELIEF WELLS.—

19 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Any development and pro-
20 duction drilling conducted under a lease granted
21 under this Act shall be accompanied by the concur-
22 rent drilling of at least 1 emergency relief well, sub-
23 ject to any applicable requirements established by
24 the Secretary.

1 “(2) ALTERNATIVE MEASURES.—The Secretary,
2 in consultation with the Administrator of the Envi-
3 ronmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of
4 Commerce, may require, as an alternative to the
5 emergency relief well requirement under paragraph
6 (1), measures that the Secretary, after a period of
7 notice and public comment, determines would be at
8 least as effective at stopping a major release from a
9 proposed well as the measures required under that
10 paragraph.”.

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