

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE LISTS THE NEPA EXCLUSIONS

At yesterday's Environment and Public Works hearing on the BP disaster, Sheldon Whitehouse asked Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Council on Environmental Quality Chair Helen Sutley why BP had been exempted from doing an Environmental Impact Study on the Macondo drilling site. He listed a number of things that should categorically exclude a project from receiving such an exemption. Two of those almost certainly applied to this well.

- Areas of high seismic risk or seismicity, relatively untested deep water, or remote areas
- Utilizing new or unusual technology

In response, Salazar spoke about how much we know about that area.

Senator, there has been significant environmental review, including Environmental Impact Statements that has been conducted with respect to this activity in the Gulf of Mexico. It is an area where we know a lot about the environment, we know a lot about the infrastructure that is there. The question of the categorical exclusion in part relates to the Congressional 30-day requirement that MMS has to approve or disapprove an exploration plan.

You think Salazar knows he's going to be held responsible for all the exemptions approved since this disaster?

In any case, here's how much BP knows about the

area:

An emergency response plan prepared by BP shows the British energy giant never anticipated an oil spill as large as the one seeping through the Gulf of Mexico. The 582-page document, titled "Regional Oil Spill Response Plan – Gulf of Mexico," was approved in July by the federal Minerals Management Service (MMS). It offers technical details on how to use chemical dispersants and provides instructions on what to say to the news media, but it does not mention how to react if a deep-water well spews oil uncontrollably.

[snip]

In a section titled "Sensitive Biological & Human-Use Resources," the plan lists "seals, sea otters and walruses" as animals that could be impacted by a Gulf of Mexico spill – even though no such animals live in the Gulf. [emphasis]

Sure, we know a lot about the environment. We just have some crazy belief that the walruses have decided to vacation on the Gulf of Mexico.