

NEW MEXICO INJURY ATTORNEY BLOG

PUBLISHED BY
COLLINS & COLLINS, P.C.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

May 12, 2010

The Blame Game Begins with the BP Spill: The Public Needs to Weigh In

The class action lawsuits have begun in the BP spill. The first suit filed by Beasley Allen was filed to recover damages, past and future, suffered by the restaurant owners along the Alabama coast. Further suits can be expected in other Gulf Coast states and from other industries harmed by the spill. The real question is what to expect from BP, Halliburton, Transocean and most of all from Congress.

Alabama alone brings in over \$3 billion a year in Gulf Coast tourism. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida likely bring in comparable Gulf Coast tourism revenue. The tourism losses will spread beyond restaurants to lodging, shopping, fishing, water sports, travel and so on. The loss in tourism dollars alone is far greater than the \$75 million cap on damages for coastal drilling accidents.

There are many other direct costs that may well dwarf the loss in tourism such as the destruction of the fishing industry, the coastal wetlands, the ocean itself, and of course the massive cleanup efforts that will be required for even nominal success in remediation of the areas affected by the spill. The indirect costs could in turn dwarf even these costs. Meat and poultry prices have already begun to rise. Gas prices will surely begin to rise. Groceries across the board will rise in costs as a result of the increased fuel costs associated with getting products to market. The rise in energy costs will affect every area of our economy likely slowing the economic recovery from the recent recession. The unemployment throughout the Gulf Coast and across suppliers of goods and services to Gulf Coast businesses will likely sky-rocket. Then there is the property damage that will be suffered by the plummet in property values across the Gulf Coast. A coastal mansion or resort is probably not as picturesque as it might be with black toxic beaches littered with decaying fish and other wildlife.

All the while the first congressional hearings on the spill saw BP, Halliburton and Transocean all denying responsibility for the spill. This comes on the heels of BP's initial public relations ploy to accept **full responsibility** for the disaster. BP continues to state that it will cover all "legitimate" losses. This is what comes out of one side of their mouths. The other side continues to try to chip away at their responsibility and the definition of "legitimate." BP, Halliburton and Transocean will continue to cast blame on one another, and eventually they will probably try to blame the Mineral Management Service.

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They may even try to blame probably Obama which seems to be standard conservative response to every problem and have no doubt that the oil industry is firmly in the conservative camp. In addition to shifting blame, they will seek cover under the \$75 million cap on damages. They will dispute every claim. They will dispute the direct losses such as the costs of cleanup and the destruction of the fishing and tourism industries along the coast. They will not even entertain the thought of compensation to the American taxpayers and property owners for the indirect costs. Do we really expect that these costs will be fully compensated when BP, Halliburton and Transocean are already disputing liability and fault?

The real remaining question is whether our leaders in Congress will force full accountability and responsibility for the harm that this spill has caused and will continue to cause our country. Or will they instead relent to the oil industry as they have so many times before. It always come down to the money. The question is whose money our leaders will value most, the taxpayers' money or their own oil industry campaign contributions? It is clear whose money dictated the absurdly low \$75 million cap on damages. Whose money will speak moving forward. You do have a say. Let your representatives know whose money they should be watching.

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