

FACT SHEET: Proposed Atlantic Ocean Oil & Gas Exploration – Seismic Surveys

By Clean Ocean Action
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WHAT is proposed?

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is proposing to use airgun arrays to blast the ocean and ocean seafloor with sound waves loud enough to pinpoint oil and gas deposits buried deep underground.

Specifically, the proposed activities – useful only really for oil and gas purposes – include:

- Deep-penetration seismic surveys,
- Electromagnetic surveys, and
- Both deep-stratigraphic and shallow test drilling.

Much of this research will focus on highlighting the oil and gas deposits most **suitable for drilling**. Other surveys will be looking at seafloor suitability for structures such as oil or gas pipelines, drill sites, or oil rig anchors by looking for geohazards, and archaeological and environmental risks.

WHERE will surveys be located?

The Area of Interest (see map, above) for exploration is in the Atlantic Ocean from the Delaware Bay to Central Florida – and extends from beaches and estuaries out to the 350 nautical-mile line from shore. The size of the area is 330,032 square miles, and extends down to a depth of 18,468 ft. The sound waves generated, though, will travel much farther.

WHEN will surveys take place?

The activities may begin by late 2012 and continue **through 2020** and beyond.

WHY do we care?

Oil exploration leads directly to oil drilling. Both the search (with disastrously loud airgun blasts) and the resulting drilling (with oil spills, discharges, and disasters a daily risk) devastate marine ecosystems, degrade marine habitat and water quality, and affect clean ocean uses like fisheries, surfing, boating, and coastal tourism. Moreover, further reliance and use of fossil fuels contributes to climate change, sea level rise, and ocean acidification – endangering our ocean, the greater human ecosystem, the American economy, and our public health.

IF this happens, what harm will result?

For marine life, like **fish, whales, dolphins, and turtles**:

- The loud blasting masks social communications used to find mates, forage for food, or identify predators.
- The long-term noise can interfere with nursing, family groups, and migration patterns.
- Repetitive sound waves can cause temporary or permanent hearing impairment and loss, serious injury from tissue trauma and hemorrhaging, or even death – as is suspected in many marine mammal stranding events world-wide.

For **humans**, and the **businesses and economies** of the coasts:

- When these surveys are ongoing (over the next decade), any other ocean use will be excluded over a huge ocean area.
- Commerce and fishing will be limited in when the ocean can be used; fish stocks and catches can be impacted.
- Divers and swimmers would be at risk of serious trauma if underwater at the time of a nearby airgun blast.
- Once oil and gas production begins, and the industrialization of the Atlantic is complete, coastal economies will suffer.

ARE these surveys even necessary?

NO. These surveys are for oil and gas exploration **only**. Studies show that there is only enough Atlantic Ocean oil to fuel the U.S. for 209 days and natural gas to last 14 months (at current consumption rates). Drilling in the Atlantic **will NOT** affect gasoline prices – we'd only save (at most) a few cents per gallon, and *only* 15-20 years after drilling begins.

WHAT solutions are needed? - A national energy policy promoting energy **efficiency and conservation**, and an orderly transition to **renewable and alternative energy sources**.

