

Nation

## Ex-EPA Official: BP a 'Serial Environmental Criminal'

Updated: 2 days 2 hours ago

[Tori Richards](#) Contributor

(June 3) -- The oil gusher in the Gulf of Mexico was a "disaster waiting to happen" because BP is a "serial environmental criminal" known for cutting corners, a former federal investigator said in an interview with AOL News today.

"They are known as the bad boys of the oil industry in the U.S., and I don't mean 'bad boys' in a flattering sense," said Scott West, a former top investigator with the Environmental Protection Agency who spent years dealing with a BP disaster in Alaska during the late 1990s. "They are criminals -- they have been convicted of several environmental crimes. They are serial environmental criminals, and that phrase comes out of the mouth of a federal prosecutor."



Democracy Now

Scott West, a former top investigator for the Environmental Protection Agency, calls BP executives "serious environmental criminals" and says the Gulf of Mexico spill was a "disaster waiting to happen."

West, who retired from the EPA in 2008 after 18 years, said he has seen BP skirt the law and cut corners for years. When the oil company's Deepwater Horizon rig exploded six weeks ago in the Gulf of Mexico, West immediately thought of criminal wrongdoing, he said. Federal EPA statutes allow for misdemeanor and felony prosecutions of corporations and individuals stemming from hazardous materials seeping into the environment.

"If I was still on the job and had the area of the gulf, the day I heard this I would've started a criminal investigation just because of the fact that it was BP," West said. "If it was Shell or anyone else, I would've monitored it. But the fact that it's BP, I would have assumed it's criminal and started an investigation before evidence disappeared."

BP officials did not return several phone calls seeking comment.

West now works as an agent for the oceanic environmental organization Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. His wife, Suzanne, runs a Facebook page titled "BP Beyond Prosecution," designed to monitor the British oil company, which is the fourth largest in the world.

West said he first learned about the company's practices in 1999 when it was convicted of dumping hazardous waste down an Alaskan well. Six years later, an Alaskan pipeline burst and West gathered intelligence from workers who said they complained to supervisors about the faulty pipe, but were told to ignore it. Knowing about a disaster in advance would normally constitute a felony, but West said the Department of Justice shut down his probe into the pipeline incident.

BP pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor. Then in 2005, a Texas refinery exploded, killing workers and releasing toxic fumes into the air.

"It infuriated me and disgusted me," West said of the halt to the earlier investigation. "At first I thought it was [President] Bush's connection to oil. But now that this administration hasn't done anything, I think it's something even more nefarious. I can't even speculate what it might be."

West doesn't buy the attorney general's recent statements that an investigation is under way. If it were, he said, people would be talking about getting grand jury subpoenas and visits from a task force of EPA and FBI agents. None of that appears to be happening, West said.

The whole episode has given the oil industry a black eye, West said, adding that he has talked to oil company insiders who are furious at BP.

"BP is notoriously known for cost-cutting and putting dollars ahead of worker safety," he said. "Personally, in 19 years, I've never investigated other companies like Shell or Mobil. I haven't had to."

Filed under: [Nation](#)

2010 AOL Inc. All Rights Reserved.