



Clean Energy Jobs^{and} Oil Company Accountability Act

Coastal Oil Spill Response, Restoration, and Prevention

Background

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts scientific research on marine and coastal ecosystems, climate, and weather; supplies information on the oceans and atmosphere; and provides stewardship of coastal and marine species and environments. NOAA has assumed a critical role in response to the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and has been in charge of providing coordinated scientific information on weather, biological response, and oil spill trajectory.

Need

The disaster in the Gulf of Mexico has revealed deficiencies in the Federal response to catastrophic oil spills in deepwater. For instance, NOAA models for tracking plumes of underwater oil must be improved so that enough time can be provided to the agencies responsible to mitigate against the impacts of oil spills. Furthermore, aging or abandoned oil infrastructure as well as abandoned offshore or sunken vessels could pose significant oil spill threats to coastal communities. NOAA currently lacks even the most basic information about potential effects of oil spills from these types of facilities.

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill has also exposed that Department of Interior was not giving enough consideration to agencies like NOAA that have specialized knowledge about the impacts that oil spills could have on marine environments.

Legislation

The Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Company Accountability Act would improve NOAA's response to oil spills by directing it to:

- Update the agency's Environmental Sensitivity Index maps and database products;
- Develop a program to better model and track subsea hydrocarbons and dispersants;

- Develop and maintain a National Information Center on Oil Spills to provide a single access point to available scientific data on oil spill preparedness, response, and restoration to inform the decisions of emergency responders;
- Assess the significance, response, frequency, size, potential fate, and potential effects of spills that originate from aging or abandoned oil infrastructure;
- Inventory offshore abandoned or sunken vessels in US waters and identify any priorities to preemptively remove oil from vessels;
- Provide grants to coastal states to ensure sufficient response at the state level to address environmental, economic, and social impacts of oil spills or other accidents resulting from Outer Continental Shelf energy activities; and
- Establish a long-term environmental monitoring and research program for the marine and coastal environment of the Gulf of Mexico to ensure that the Federal government has peer-reviewed scientific data and information to assess long-term direct and indirect impacts in the Gulf of Mexico caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Company Accountability Act would also authorize NOAA and the Coast Guard to submit comments on a proposed leasing program to the Department of Interior. Furthermore, the Secretary of Interior would be required to submit those comments to the President and Congress with its proposed leasing program, along with an indication why any specific recommendation was not accepted.