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GULF OIL SPILL

# Gulf Drilling Moratorium May Be Lifted Early

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Contributor

WASHINGTON (Sept. 27) -- The Interior Department plans to issue two new oil drilling regulations later this week, signaling that a six-month deepwater drilling moratorium for the Gulf of Mexico may be lifted early, a presidential panel was told here Monday.

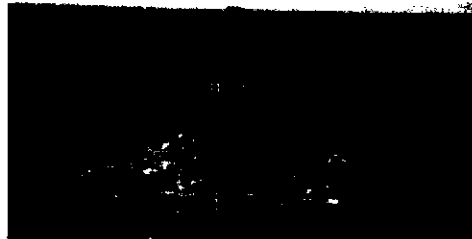
But Michael Bronwich, director of the newly organized Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, told the Oil Spill Commission that drilling will not immediately resume once the moratorium is lifted.

"You are not going to see drilling going on the next day or even the next week," he said. "I haven't talked to the individual operators. I don't know which are already compliant and which will take time."

The new rules impose a "significant number" of new technical requirements on drilling, he said, but they should be no surprise to the industry. They were outlined in a report issued a month after BP's well blew out on April 20.

William Reilly, co-chairman of the Oil Spill Commission, expressed surprise that the ban -- set to expire Nov. 30 -- has not yet been lifted. He said the 33 rigs affected have been inspected. Nine violations were found, and Reilly said he believes they have been corrected.

He also expressed disappointment in Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's plan to reorganize the Interior Department in order to separate its conflicting roles as oil lease salesman and oil rig inspector.



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