

The Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion was bound to put some pressure on the Obama administration to renounce the plan it announced just three weeks earlier to open new areas to offshore drilling. Today, [the President ordered](#) Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to report on how to reduce the risk of oil spills from offshore rigs, and ordered that no new leases go ahead until adequate safeguards can be assured.

That delay is not likely to have any practical impact, because the report is due in 30 days and no lease sales were planned over that time anyway. But it does show that the administration, understandably, feels the need to provide greater assurances of safety before moving ahead with new leasing. As [Rick noted earlier](#), the story had been that modern drilling technology would prevent any repeat of the 1969 Santa Barbara disaster. That claim is no longer reassuring, in the face of the failure of Deepwater Horizon's blowout prevention system. The White House is now saying that it won't rule out changes in its offshore drilling plan based on Salazar's report. You can bet there will be big changes if the investigation suggests that this kind of incident could occur at another platform.

Meanwhile, it's time to bring in the lawyers. According to the [New York Times](#):

[T]he Justice Department said Friday it was sending a team of attorneys to New Orleans to meet with the U.S. attorney and response teams and to monitor the spill.

"The British Petroleum oil spill has already cost lives and created a major environmental incident," Attorney General Holder said in a statement. "The Justice Department stands ready to make available every resource at our disposal to vigorously enforce the laws that protect the people who work and reside near the Gulf, the wildlife, the environment and the American taxpayers."

Several civil suits already have been filed by private lawyers in the Gulf region.

And of course work is continuing to contain and clean up the oil, which is fast approaching the coastline. The shrimp season [has been closed](#) almost as soon as it began. BP is hiring idled fishermen for cleanup work, but so far isn't offering to make up for their lost fishing income.