

When he lifted the moratorium on new offshore leasing in July of 2008, President Bush [assured](#) us that “advances in technology have made it possible to conduct oil exploration in the OCS that is out of sight, protects coral reefs and habitats, and protects against oil spills.” We know now that he was wrong, in part because drilling has pushed into newer and deeper waters where technologies have not yet become tried and true.

I’m not bringing up his statement as a belated exercise in Bush-bashing. Rather, Bush’s statement and the Deepwater Horizon disaster are a vivid reminder to be skeptical of claims that new technologies — or old technologies applied in new settings — are disaster proof.

The World Coal Institute [says](#) that underground carbon sequestration is a proven technology. Maybe so. But offshore drilling was also supposed to be a proven technology. The BP blowout is a sobering reminder that things don’t always stay underground where we want them to be, particularly when they’re under high pressure. I think we have to assume that sooner or later there will be a major CO₂ blowout from a sequestration site. This doesn’t necessarily mean that we shouldn’t develop carbon sequestration as a climate mitigation strategy. But we shouldn’t make unrealistic assumptions about reliability.