

BP Agrees to Plead Guilty to Felony Charges Arising Out of Deepwater Horizon Disaster | 1

The Wall Street Journal is [reporting](#) that British Petroleum has agreed to plead guilty to felony charges stemming from the Deepwater Horizon disaster that killed 11 workers and precipitated the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history. As part of the plea bargain, BP has agreed to pay the federal government \$4.5 billion in penalties, including \$1.26 billion in criminal fines.

BP has reportedly agreed to plead guilty to 11 felony counts relating to the worker deaths aboard the drilling rig and, significantly, to one felony county of obstruction of Congress. The latter charge relates to BP's underreporting the rate of oil leaking into the Gulf of Mexico from the doomed well. The settlement with federal prosecutors remains subject to approval by the U.S. District Court.

These are by far the largest and most serious criminal enforcement sanctions ever assessed in a U.S. environmental prosecution. At first blush, the plea bargain appears fully consonant with the egregious corporate behavior that gave rise to and followed the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

The \$64,000 question is what criminal and civil sanctions lie ahead for the other corporate actors whose acts of omission and commission contributed to the disaster?