FACT SHEET
OIL & GAS DRILLING IN AMERICA: SOME KEY FACTS

The oil and gas industry claims that the only way to address our country's numerous energy issues is to open more public lands and waters to oil and natural gas drilling. What they don't tell you is that drilling in America is already occurring at an astonishing pace and in a bewildering number of places. The facts below show that "more drilling" won't solve America's energy problems.

More oil and gas drilling occurs in America every year than anywhere else in the world.
Since 1950, 2.6 million oil and natural gas wells have been drilled in the U.S.[1] By the end of 2009 there were a combined total of 824,847 producing oil and gas wells in the United States.[2] As of the first week in February 2011, there were 1,739 rotary drilling rigs operating in U.S. lands and waters, more than in any other country in the world.[3]

America ranks #1 in natural gas production, and #3 in oil production.
We are the largest producer of natural gas in the world[4] and the third-largest producer of oil.[5] Yet, we have only 3.8% of the world's natural gas reserves, and less than 2% of proven oil reserves.[6]

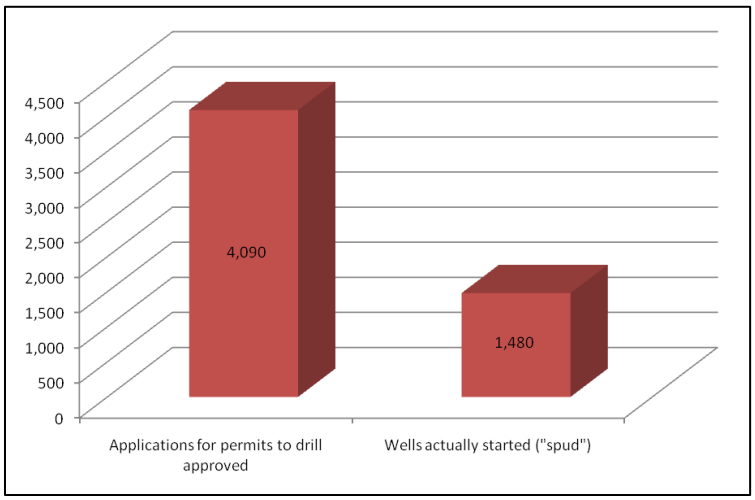
Tens of thousands of wells are drilled every year in the U.S.
At the beginning of the decade 27,000 oil and gas wells were drilled in the U.S. in one year. But last year over 40,000 wells were drilled on American lands and waters.[7]

The West's public lands are already extensively drilled.
There are tens of thousands of oil and natural gas wells on public lands, with thousands more currently approved for drilling and tens of thousands more planned for the future.[8] Such intense, localized development makes other uses of the land—hunting, fishing, recreating—difficult if not impossible.

Natural gas field in northwestern Wyoming.
Photo: Peter Aengst.

Tens of millions of acres of onshore and offshore federal lands are already under lease to oil and gas companies – much of it unused.
According to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) data, as of FY 2010, 41,000,000 acres of federal public lands were leased for oil and gas development, an area the size of the state of Tennessee.[9] However, 29,000,000 acres of these leases are sitting idle. In addition, over 34 million acres of offshore federal lands are under lease in the Gulf of Mexico alone, where roughly 4,000 platforms produce oil and/or gas.[10]

Industry has acquired thousands of federal drilling permits in the last year alone.
Though the industry loudly complains about "restrictive" policies that allegedly are thwarting oil and gas development, in fact the BLM issued over 4,000 drilling permits last year, of which approximately 2,500 were not used by the end of FY 2010.[11] *In other words, as of the end of FY 2010, the oil and gas industry possessed thousands of federal drilling permits it was not using.*



Weakening or eliminating health and environmental safeguards to accommodate "more drilling" will not solve America's energy problems.
America consumes 22.8% of the oil produced in the world each year, and 20.9% of the world's natural gas production. But we have only 1.6% of the world's "proved oil reserves",[12] and only 3.8% of its "proved gas reserves".[13] *No amount of drilling – and as demonstrated above we do more of it by far than any other country – will change these basic facts*. Because drilling is already occurring at a furious pace on both federal and non-federal lands and waters, and because our share of the world's oil and gas reserves is so small, "more drilling" is not the answer to our future energy needs. Rather, policies to encourage energy efficiency and conservation coupled with the development of clean renewable energy resources are the keys to a sustainable energy future.

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[1] Number includes development and exploratory wells. United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=E_ERTW0_XWC0_NUS_C&f=A
[2] United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petrosystem/us_table.html
[3] Baker Hughes. http://investor.shareholder.com/bhi/rig_counts/rc_index.cfm
[4] Data as of 2009 (most recent available). United States Energy Information Agency. http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/cfapps/ipdbproject/iedindex3.cfm?tid=3&pid=alltypes&aid=1&cid=all,&syid=2005&eyid=2009&unit=BCF
[5] Data as of 2008 (most recent available). United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/country/country_energy_data.cfm?fips=US
[6] Data as of 2008. United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/country/country_energy_data.cfm?fips=US
[7] United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/mer/pdf/pages/sec5_4.pdf
[8] As of December 1, 2008, there were 88,357 oil and gas wells on BLM lands. Government Accountability Office. http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10245.pdf
[9] United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/newsroom/Energy_Facts_07/statistics.html
[10] BOEMRE, *Gulf of Mexico Region Blocks and Active Leases by planning Area*, January 3, 2011; EIA, *Overview of U.S. Legislation and Regulations Affecting Offshore Oil and Natural Gas Activity*, p. 2, September, 2005.
[11] United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/newsroom/Energy_Facts_07/statistics.html
[12] Data as of 2009. United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/reserves.html
[13] Data as of 2009. United States Energy Information Agency. http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/reserves.html