



In Too Deep: BP and the Drilling Race That Took it Down

By Stanley Reed, Alison Fitzgerald

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The truth behind the greatest environmental disaster in U.S. history

In 2005, fifteen workers were killed when BP's Texas City Refinery exploded. In 2006, corroded pipes owned by BP led to an oil spill in Alaska. Now, in 2010, eleven men drilling for BP were killed in the blowout of the Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico.

What's next? In *In Too Deep: BP and the Drilling Race That Took it Down*, Stanley Reed, a journalist who has covered BP for over a decade, and investigative reporter Alison Fitzgerald answer not only that question, but also examine why these disasters happen to BP so much more than other large oil companies.

- Places the blame on a corporate culture created by former BP CEO John Browne who was forced to resign in 2007 after he lied in court documents in a case involving his gay lover
- Details a BP built on risk-taking and cost-cutting
- Examines the past, present, and future of BP

In August 2010, BP successfully "killed" the company's damaged deepwater well. But, the environmental fallout and public relations campaign to rebuild the brand are just beginning. *In Too Deep* details why BP, why now, and what's next for this oil giant.

Q&A with Authors Stanley Reed and Alison Fitzgerald



How did you do the research for this book?

We had both been writing about BP and the disaster for some time so we each had an enormous trove of information, interviews and documents before we even began writing *In Too Deep*.

Stanley had covered BP for more than a decade and drew on the reporting from his many stories for *BusinessWeek*. He also had notes and recordings from several exclusive interviews with John Browne and a trip to Russia with the powerful BP boss. The book includes lots of never-before-published details from these experiences.

Alison had been covering the investigations into the causes of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and so had a vast file of documents related to BP's safety history and violations.

Armed with that information, we both set out to speak to as many people as possible -- BP executives, former executives, competitors, oil workers, lawyers, government officials, safety experts, and politicians. We conducted dozens of new interviews just for the book while continuing to follow the investigations and the financial and legal troubles of the company.

We also had the help of our Bloomberg colleagues who were writing about this tragedy every day and were generous in sharing their research, published stories, and unpublished notes. Their work was central to shaping this book.



Author Stanley Reed

You trace BP's record of accidents -- and specifically the Gulf oil spill -- to the reign of John Browne, the CEO who preceded Tony Hayward. What was it about his tenure that led you to that conclusion?

John Browne built today's BP, mostly through deals. He also pushed hard for financial performance. The company he created was good at gaining access to oil both through deals and exploration. But it was weaker on day-to-day operations. The culture he instilled at BP stressed financial performance and risk-taking while paying only lip-service to safety. Even before the end of Browne's tenure at BP in 2007, those shortcomings were revealed by the explosion that killed 15 people at the Texas City refinery in 2005.

Tony Hayward vowed to fix those problems, but he was a protégé of Browne, and in the end couldn't do enough to change his predecessor's legacy.

Was BP really different than other oil giants like ExxonMobil or Shell?

Yes. This was actually a notion that surprised us both, in fact. Just after the Deepwater Horizon exploded, many people thought this was simply a random accident, one that was bound to happen to someone, and that BP was unlucky. Instead, we heard over and over from oil executives, regulators, and outside safety experts that BP had a particular problem with safety. The actual safety and enforcement records confirmed what all these people were telling us.

What do the other companies do that's different?

We looked at ExxonMobil, in particular, and found that they have strict safety rules and these are inviolable. Every operation is tested against a safety matrix. As the risk rises, the hurdle to approve the operation also rises. When they can't make the hurdle, the job is canceled.

BP didn't have such a strict system in place. The company had a decentralized structure that left mid-level people in charge of major decisions and those people were judged and compensated based on the financial performance of their units. BP was putting in a centralized safety system, but the Gulf of Mexico unit had resisted that.

Given that, how is it that BP was so successful before 2010?

Browne bought two companies, Amoco and Arco, when oil prices were in the doldrums. Those deals looked very smart when prices surged and the profits rolled in. BP is also very good -- better than its competitors -- at exploration and at persuading governments to give it access to oil. They spent less money to find more new oil than almost any other oil company for more than a decade.

What's next for BP?

BP is still a money machine. It's profitable again even after writing off \$40 billion 2010. Recent asset sales proved that BP's oil and gas properties are worth much more than the market thought. With its strong portfolio and depressed stock price, the company is a potential takeover target--though only a handful of companies could contemplate such a move. The new CEO, Bob Dudley, is trying to instill a new safety culture throughout the company. His challenge is to clean up BP's act without destroying its creativity.



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In Too Deep: BP and the Drilling Race That Took it Down By Stanley Reed, Alison Fitzgerald Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1128487 in Books
- Published on: 2011-01-11
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.30" h x .92" w x 6.30" l, .94 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 248 pages



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Reed and Fitzgerald begin their first book with a riveting description of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explosion. Those employees who weren't killed by the explosion had to "jump the ten stories from the blazing rig to dark waters below." With our attention duly captured, the authors do little to hold it for the rest of the book. Facts are recounted ("Oil flowed for 87 days") and historical perspectives are provided (although it was BP CEO Tony Hayward who received the brunt of the public outcry, former CEO John Browne helped move the company from mid-sized to a kind of "Goldman Sachs" of the oil industry). The authors, both veteran reporters, certainly did their research, noting that BP's plans for managing a disaster on the Gulf Coast were incomplete and apparently copied from Arctic scenarios; documents include recovery plans for "walruses, seals and sea lions." They also unearth past disasters, such as BP's 2005 Texas City refinery explosion in which 15 died, and an oil leak in Alaska in March of 2006 that led the House Energy and Commerce Committee to determine that BP had inadequately maintained its pipeline network, a discovery that led the authors to determine that company incentives as far back as the 1990s helped create the Deepwater disaster. Unfortunately the narrative lacks the emotional color that made this story so compelling. What could have been fascinating is instead just gritty and bleak.

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Review

“...the latest, and probably the best, of what one might call the “private sector” books about the BP spill...by a pair of talented and experienced Bloomberg reporters”

—**Financial Times**

“Among the first to bring a book to the public are the Bloomberg News team of Stanley Reed and Alison Fitzgerald. Reed, based in London, had covered BP for more than a decade before the explosion. Fitzgerald is a Washington, D.C., correspondent ferreting out the political angles of corporate influence. The two journalists make a logical team, and their book is often enlightening about the corporate-political nexus that placed enrichment of the already rich and aggrandizement of the already influent above the common good. . . Reed and Fitzgerald personalize BP by devoting lots of space to John Browne, the flamboyant chief executive officer from 1995-2007. . . He is by far the most memorable character in the book.”

—**USA Today**

From the Inside Flap

In 2005, fifteen workers were killed when BP's Texas City refinery exploded. In 2006, corroded pipes owned by BP led to an oil spill in Alaska. And then in 2010, eleven BP contract workers were killed in the Gulf of Mexico's Macondo well blowout. By the time it plugged the hole at the bottom of the Gulf, BP had become the biggest oil polluter in U.S. history, dwarfing the notorious Exxon Valdez, the oil tanker whose drunken captain ran his ship aground in Prince William Sound off Alaska. Some commentators—perhaps BP apologists—suggest this was bound to happen and BP was simply the unlucky company to which this disaster befell. But Stanley Reed, who has been covering the company for over ten years, and Alison Fitzgerald saw otherwise.

In *In Too Deep*, Reed and investigative reporter Fitzgerald show that there is likely a reason that it was a BP

well that blew out, and not one that belonged to Exxon or Shell—and that the blame may lie in BP's culture of risk-taking and hard focus on financial results. That culture, they show, was created under former CEO John Browne, who reshaped the company during his twelve-year tenure and then was forced to resign in 2007. They reveal how Browne, while beloved by investors for his growth strategy that saw BP's stock rise, had built a company focused on acquisitions and cost cutting—cultural assets in some areas that ended up being cultural poison in the area of deepwater drilling. The story of how the Gulf disaster happened, and of the behind-the-scenes management of the company, is a fascinating object lesson that we will be learning from for decades.

In July 2010, BP successfully "killed" the company's damaged deepwater well. But the environmental fallout and public relations campaign to rebuild the brand are just beginning. In *Too Deep* details why BP suffered this disaster, why now, and what's next for the oil giant.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dick McAlister:

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Jared Smith:

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