

The Myth of Environmentally Sensitive Oil Development in Alaska

* **Myth 1:** “Oil spills are rare.” **Reality:** The Prudhoe Bay oil fields and Trans-Alaska Pipeline have caused an average of **453 spills annually** on the North Slope since 1996, according to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC). Between 1996 and 2004, 4,532 spills unleashed more than 1.9 million gallons of toxic substances - most commonly diesel, crude oil, and hydraulic oil. ADEC lists over **100 sites of contamination** caused by the North Slope oil industry.

* **Myth 2:** “Modern cleanup methods can take care of any spills.” **Reality:** According to the **National Academy of Sciences:** “No current cleanup methods remove more than a small fraction of oil spilled in marine waters, especially in the presence of broken ice.”

* **Myth 3:** “Drilling in the Arctic Ocean poses no additional threat.” **Reality:** The Department of Interior’s Minerals Management Service has said that **750 to 1,000 oil spills are likely** to result from Chukchi Sea oil and gas development - yet there are currently no oil recovery technologies that work in the icy conditions that exist in the Chukchi Sea.

* **Myth 4:** “Oil facilities are well maintained and regulated.” **Reality:** Just four years ago, BP’s corrosion problems at Prudhoe Bay caused the **largest oil spill in North Slope history** – 200,000 gallons of crude oil. Worse yet, BP couldn’t guarantee that corrosion in their negligently managed oil field would not cause further environmental devastation. BP was subsequently fined for criminal negligence.

* **Myth 5:** “Oil facilities are well monitored.” **Reality:** In February 2001, BP discovered a ruptured pipeline at Prudhoe Bay and reported that 9,400 gallons of crude oil and 2,100 gallons of methanol had spilled – they later revealed that the spill occurred in early December 2000, months before its discovery. **Oil had leaked into nearby drinking water supplies.** ADEC contended BP was liable for spilling 60,000 gallons, nearly six times the amount BP originally reported.

* **Myth 6:** “Development only affects a small amount of land.” **Reality:** The negative effects of oil development extend well beyond the immediate ‘footprint’ of development, according to the **National Academy of Sciences (NAS).** “The common practice of describing the effects of particular projects in terms of the area directly disturbed by roads, pads, pipeline, and other facilities ignores the spreading character of oil development on the North Slope and the consequences of this to... wildland values over an area far exceeding the area directly affected.” The oil field industrial sprawl on the North Slope, including drill sites, airports, roads, and gravel mines, has a direct ‘footprint’ of 15,000 acres, but it actually spreads across an area of more than **640,000 acres, or 1,000 square miles**, according to the Academy.

* **Myth 7:** “The ‘ice roads’ simply melt away.” **Reality:** Global warming is significantly diminishing the oil companies’ ability to utilize ice roads. Over the past three decades, ice road use on the North Slope has been shortened from 204 to 124 days. The fact is that every **oil field on Alaska’s North Slope has permanent gravel roads**, and the gravel mines that must accompany them.

