Oily Oysters Crude Shrimp

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A recent article reporting on fishing families near the BP oil spill who are switching to “grind meats” [1] reminded me of a recent conversation I had with one of my sisters concerning the population of oysters that thrive in the Gulf.

We were dining at Di Giovanni’s in Roscoe, IL, and I ordered the oysters Rockefeller — a great concoction of oysters stuffed with various cheeses, bacon and spinach. As I devoured the treat, my sister pointed out I should savor them while they last, since the oil spill may kill them off or make them too toxic to eat before our next dining experience.

The article discussed how families near the Gulf, who depended on local oysters, shrimp and crab as part of their daily diet, had to switch to “grind meats” that included hamburgers and hot dogs.

There are some who may think this to be a small issue, but to those who reside along the coasts of the Gulf, seafood isn’t just a food source, it’s a way of life. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report in *Fishing Industry in the Gulf of Mexico* [2], “In 2008, commercial fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico harvested 1.27 billion pounds of finfish and shellfish. Commercial fishermen earned $659 million in total landings revenue in 2008.”

Another recent article reported China's encounter [3] with exploding oil pipelines that led to another devastating water disaster. The pipeline is owned by China National Petroleum Corp., another oil-producing company whose equipment failure seems to remain unexplained to the public.

An environmental official named the Chinese oil spill a "severe threat" to sea life and water quality, while a local fisherman claimed that if it wasn't cleaned up by September, the seafood would be ruined by the oily smell, potentially hindering China's fish market.

As reported by ABN Newswire, the *Glitnir Seafood Industry Report* [4]documented that China produced 35 percent of total seafood products in 2007.

I never thought a Southern Wisconsinite, like me, would be directly affected by the BP or Yellow Sea oil spills.

Each of these tragic events not only affects the marine life that swims in the oily aftermath, but it also affects those of us who enjoy and appreciate the fine flavors of aquatic cuisine; the workers who provide and distribute to the fish market; and the residents who live near each of the oil spills. And I'm left wondering, were they preventable?

In both situations, the cause of the explosions is mainly unclear, and it's been reported that BP may have taken a few short-cuts concerning safety standards and procedures to rush production and save on costs, which only adds to my disappointment that I may not be able to enjoy one of my all-time favorite delicacies.

There are dozens of stories out there, some left unheard, that deal with equipment failures or constructional errors, whether from normal wear and tear or from inattention to details; and some of the major incidents seem to be the least explained or left with no one to take the brunt of responsibility.

I get market competition, but I'm still confused how certain companies put profit and rapid distribution over quality and safety. Some of the best products out there took weeks, months or even years to produce, and consumers never minded to pay for the craftsmanship because it would last, and they wouldn't get hurt in the process of using it.

The rapid advancements in technology increase production times and demand, leading to fiercer and more brutal competition, which seems to be a more tempting reason to ignore certain safety standards and procedures. And then when you-know-what hits the fan, consumers become the victims of unexplained misfortunes, left stranded among oily oysters and crude shrimp.

Even if you hate seafood, let me know your thoughts on the BP and China oil spills. Could they have been prevented or should these sorts of incidents be expected to come with the territory? Should drilling still be allowed in such areas where not just marine life is affected? Post your comments below or send them to

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