

Is Offshore Drilling on Our Horizon?

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Within hours of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, media outlets across the country were trying to reach UNH's Nancy Kinner. A month later, she was testifying before Congress. Now the professor of civil and environmental engineering and expert in oil spill response and restoration has become a media go-to for questions regarding the Trump administration's move to open Atlantic waters to offshore drilling exploration, and what would have to happen for a plan to move forward.



“The key question is exactly where would that drilling occur?” Kinner says. “Unless conditions change a lot, the New Hampshire coast probably would not be the first place where drilling would be desirable — for a lot of factors.”

Among those are determining that sufficient amounts of oil exist,

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getting a production rig out there and having the infrastructure to deliver oil being produced. “In the Gulf of Mexico, for example, a lot of that oil is pumped back onshore through pipelines. On the East Coast, we don’t have any offshore wells or the infrastructure. And that is a major investment,” Kinner explains.

Even before that, Kinner says, the process to move forward with any plan for leases would be a lengthy one. “We’re talking years even without any court cases,” she says. But, she stresses, a long approval process does not mean there isn’t reason for concern. “I am saying there will be a process, and we need to be paying attention to that process.”

The potential for a spill could prove to be a financial deterrent to expansion as well. “Oil companies have to have a plan for that as part of this process. They have to be able to show the ability to control if something goes wrong,” Kinner says. “Industry invested in a capping stack for the Gulf of Mexico. We don’t have that infrastructure anywhere off the Atlantic coast. This will be highly scrutinized.”

Could drilling happen?

“Yes, it could,” Kinner says. “Could it happen in the next couple of years? Probably not.”

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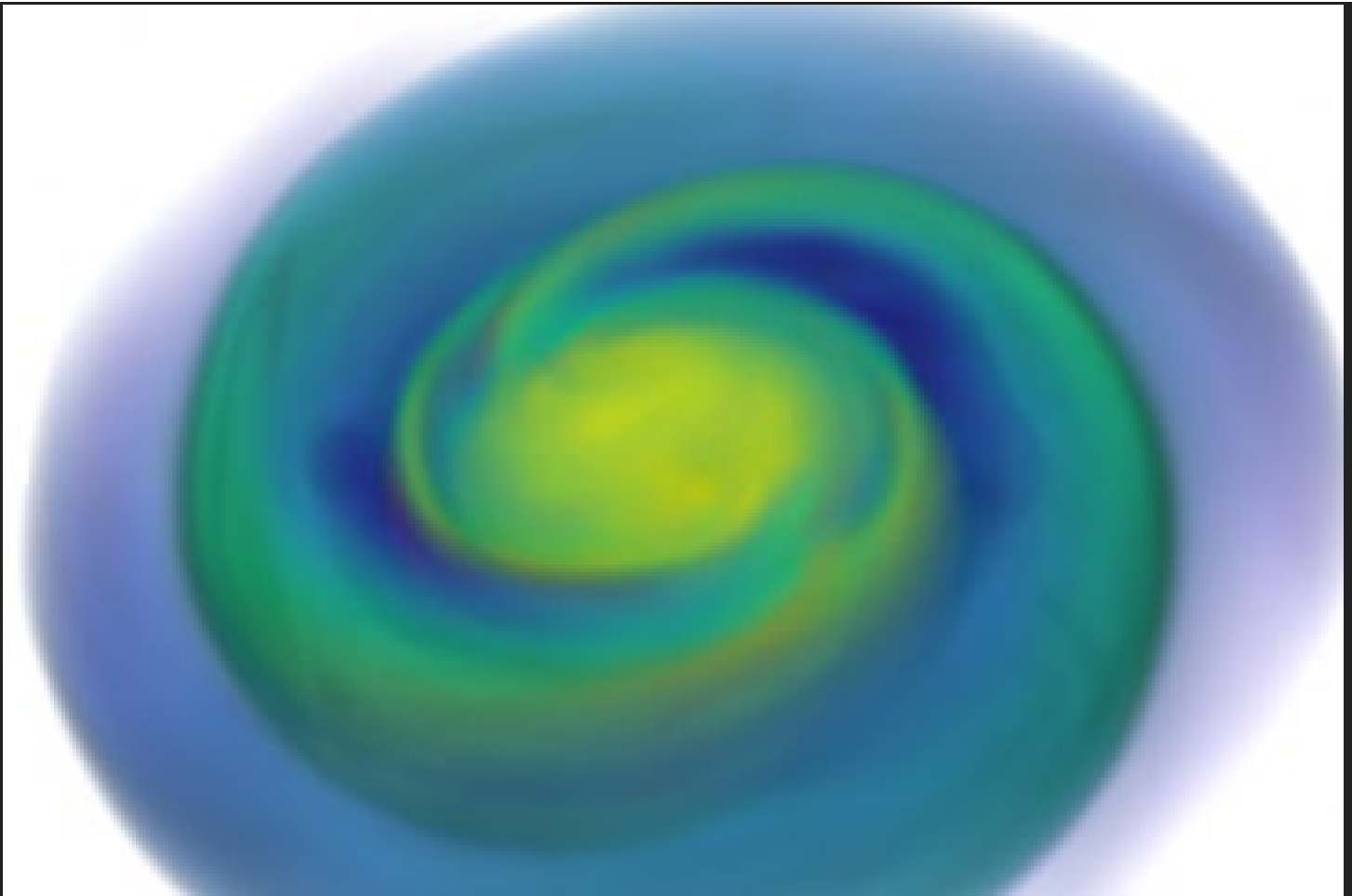
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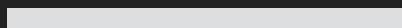
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