

Grassley wants answers on oil rig regulation

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As wads of goeey tar wash up on beaches as far away as Key West, Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley is sending letters to a federal agency, B.P. and two other companies involved in the Gulf of Mexico oil rig explosion and spill. Grassley says he wants answers about media reports that claim federal regulators looked the other way as safety precautions were skirted or ignored.

“From the Department of Interior, I want to know how its Minerals Management Service responded to prior reports and recommendations of its own inspector general,” Grassley says, “and about conflicts of interest statements from members of an Interior Department board, responsible for examining safety procedures for offshore drilling.”

Grassley is also asking whether all -other- wells in the Gulf are in compliance. He’s also requesting copies of communications between B.P. and Transocean which may shed light on why the oil rig exploded. Iowa Congressman Bruce Braley has introduced a bill in the House that would raise the cap on the amount of damages a company can be assessed following an oil spill. Grassley says he’ll support the bill but hasn’t settled on a dollar figure.

“I don’t have the slightest idea why there is a cap and I think it’s only ten-million (dollars) and it oughta’ be more,” Grassley says. “Exactly how much more, I don’t know. Should there be any limit? I’m not sure I’ve come to a conclusion on that but I’m sure for raising the limit X-number of dollars and I’ll figure that out as time goes on.” Much like the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989, Grassley expects the environmental cleanup of this latest far-reaching spill to involve a very lengthy process.

“Solving this thing won’t be done for years, you know, so we’ve got an opportunity,” Grassley says. “Besides, in this particular instance, BP has said they intend to pay everything so I don’t know whether a cap is even an issue for this cleanup.” Grassley is the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over oil spill liability trust funds, as well as tax incentives for deep-water drilling.