

Natural Catastrophes

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 **TOP OF THE TIMES**

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Plan for Coastal Drilling Emerges

□ Pointing to Katrina's hit to fuel supplies, some in Congress seek to diversify by loosening a ban covering areas such as offshore California.

By Richard Simon and Kenneth R. Weiss, Times Staff Writers

WASHINGTON — Citing hurricane damage to the oil and gas industry in the Gulf of Mexico, key lawmakers are trying to relax a decades-old federal ban on new drilling off California and the Atlantic Seaboard and to encourage energy prospecting in the Rocky Mountains.

Congressional proposals also aim to waive some air pollution rules to encourage expansion of oil refineries and to authorize oil drilling beneath Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"Mother Nature proved just how vulnerable America is to supply disruption," said House Resources Committee Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-Tracy). "We must do more to increase and to diversify domestic supplies."

The legislation, likely to be voted on soon in the House, comes as oil- and natural-gas-dependent manufacturers have urged Congress to reopen the "85% of all federally controlled coastal waters [that] are currently off-limits to energy production."

"The nation is paying the price for concentrating so much of its energy infrastructure in a small geographic area," wrote the American Gas Assn. and more than 100 other petrochemical companies and manufacturers. "As we go about the business of recovering from Hurricane Katrina ... Congress has an opportunity to reduce the nation's vulnerability to sudden energy shocks by expanding our sources and supplies of energy — especially in our coastal waters."

1) Read the text above and explain the following words and expressions in your own words

a) coastal drilling

b) fuel supplies

c) loosening a ban

d) offshore California

e) key lawmakers

f) vulnerable

g) supply disruption

h) federally controlled coastal waters

i) (to be) off-limits

2) The following expressions taken from the text above can help you to improve your writing style. Use them in a sentence putting them in a different context from the one above

a) to point to something

b) to seek to

c) to cite

d) to aim to do something

e) likely to

f) to urge

g) to go about (doing) something

3) Chose one of the tasks below and write about 200– 250 words

a) Write a confidential letter to the governor of California: seen from an environmentalist's view, comment on the plans to reopen protected areas for drilling oil and natural gas.

b) You are the president of a big fuel producing company. Try to defend the government's plans to open protected areas off the coast of California in an open letter to the Los Angeles Times. (tip: you should directly address all the readers)

c) Write a dialogue: In a TV discussion on the topic introduced in the text above, the following characters participate: the TV host, an environmentalist, a resident of the California coast, a resident of the Rocky Mountains, a resident of the Gulf of Mexico, an important manager of the American oil industry and a politician. Think well of which arguments they might bring up!