Judge Rules On The Ability To Sue BP For Punitive Damages
by: Jack Williams

A federal judge has ruled that victims of the BP oil spill, including businesses and individuals, can sue for punitive damages. But a local law professor says that may be more of a hassle for BP than a huge money drain.

BP is already facing tens of millions of dollars in compensatory damage claims and now plaintiffs can go after punitive damages that in essence would punish BP above and beyond the original damages. Adam Gershowitz is associate professor of law at the University of Houston Law Center. He says the ruling may not affect BP as much as you might think.

"Corporations have really succeeded in limiting the impact of punitive damages, so there are now statutes that limit them. There are court cases that limit them as well, making them much less of a problem than they used to be for corporate defendants."

Gershowitz says if plaintiffs get any money at all for punitive damages, it will likely be in line with what they've gotten in compensatory damages and not a whole lot more.