



The federal government on Monday gave Royal Dutch Shell the final permit it needs to drill for oil in the Arctic Ocean off Alaska's northwest coast for the first time in more than two decades.

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement announced that it approved the permit to drill below the ocean floor after the oil giant brought in a required piece of equipment to stop a possible well blowout.

The agency previously allowed Shell to begin drilling only the top sections of two wells in the Chukchi Sea because the key equipment, called a capping stack, was stuck on a vessel that needed repair in Portland, Oregon.

Because the vessel arrived last week, Shell is free to drill into oil-bearing rock, estimated at 8,000 feet below the ocean floor, for the first time since its last exploratory well was drilled in 1991.

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