



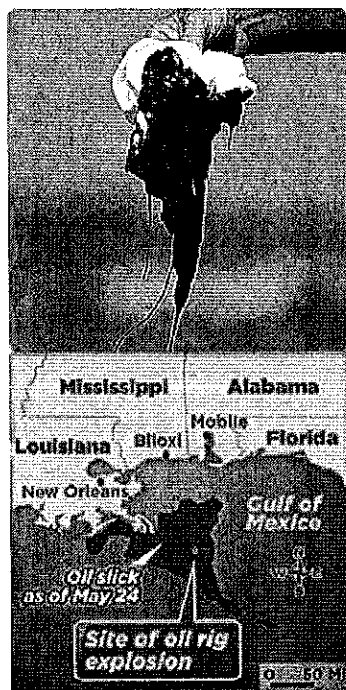
Lindsey Allen of environmental organization Greenpeace inspects a patch of oil at the mouth of the Mississippi River in Louisiana, May 18, 2010. (Photo: Sean Gardner/Greenpeace/REUTERS)

Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico Worst in U.S. History



New government estimates say the oil spilled in the Gulf of Mexico is far more than originally believed. Meanwhile, efforts continue to stop the massive spill.

By Laura Leigh Davidson | May 25, 2010



Top: Sticky, thick, brown oil swiped up from a beach in Grand Isle, Louisiana. (Photo: Charlie Varley / SIPA Press/NEWSCOM). Bottom: Map by Jim McMahon.

Breaking News Thursday, May 27: U.S. government scientists said Thursday that much more oil is spewing into the Gulf of Mexico than they once thought. Two teams of scientists estimate between 500,000 and 800,000 gallons of oil are flowing from the busted undersea well each day. That's more than twice the original 210,000-gallon estimate given by British Petroleum (BP).

Preliminary estimates from this latest study say between 17 million and 39 million gallons of oil have gushed into the ocean since the April 20 explosion that killed 11 workers. That's far more oil than was spilled by the oil tanker Exxon Valdez in 1989. The Valdez ran aground and leaked 11 million gallons of oil into the waters off the coast of Alaska.

Meanwhile, efforts continue to stop the flow of oil from its source—5,000 feet underwater. BP says it will take through the weekend to know whether its "top kill" method is working to slow the flow of oil from the ocean floor.

This is a breaking news update. The following article is the original story published by Scholastic News Online on Tuesday, May 25.

More than a month after an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, killing 11 workers, oil is still gushing from the ocean floor at a furious rate. All efforts to shut off the damaged underwater oil well at the source of the massive spill have failed. British Petroleum (BP), the energy company that operated the destroyed oil rig, plans to try another new method to stop the flow of oil on Wednesday.

Engineers will try and plug the gusher with a method called "top kill." They will pump vast amounts of heavy mud into the leaking pipe in the hopes of slowing down the flow of oil. Once the leak is slowed, they will inject cement into the well, with the hope of "killing" the flow of oil for good.

Workers Honored, Coastline Suffers

The eleven workers who were killed in the April 20 oil rig explosion were honored in a memorial service on Tuesday.

The service was held in Jackson, Mississippi, a city located on the Gulf coast where thick, nasty oil continues to coat delicate marshlands. Globbs of oil that look like balls of tar are washing up on beaches. Hundreds of animals on land and at sea have been found dead—some covered in the sticky, toxic substance. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says thousands more animals have probably been injured or sickened by the oil and its fumes.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard and BP, more than 6 million gallons of oil have already been released into Gulf waters since the explosion. The spill has affected more than 150 miles of coastline from Louisiana to Alabama. Many experts think the official estimates are way too low, and that much more oil has been spewing from the still-uncapped well. They believe this oil-spill disaster has already become the worst in U.S. history.

Will It Work?

Tony Hayward, the chief executive of BP, said the top-kill method has a 60 percent to 70 percent chance of working. But while this method has worked on aboveground oil wells, it has never been tested 5,000 feet underwater.

If the top-kill method does not work, BP has its hopes pinned on the "relief wells" it has been digging since the spill began. But drilling on the ocean floor is tricky and takes time. It could be August before those relief wells are completed.

Surveying the Damage

White House officials say President Obama will travel to Louisiana on Friday to get a firsthand look at efforts to stop the oil leak. It will be his second trip to the region since the leak began.

Meanwhile, the public grows more frustrated at the lack of progress in containing the leak. The spill is threatening the incomes of many Gulf Coast residents, particularly those in the fishing industry. Commercial and recreational fishing in the region remains banned, for fear that the fish have been contaminated by the oil-polluted waters in which they live.

"Three weeks already I am not working," Louisiana oyster fisherman Nikola Zarak told news organization Reuters.

"I lost a job. Six people working for me—they do not have jobs," said Zarak. "My kids are in college, so [my family doesn't] know what to do in the future. We feel like we are abandoned."

TRACKING THE OIL-SPILL DISASTER