

As Predicted, BP Tries to Pretend New Leak is a “Natural Seep”

By [Washington's Blog](#)

Global Research, July 21, 2010

[Washington's Blog](#) 19 July 2010

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Listening to the news this morning as I drove to work, I heard that BP is saying that the seep discovered near the blownout well might be a natural seep .

Reuters [notes](#):

A BP spokesman said the seepage was detected by its engineers but it was unclear whether the source was the blown-out well, adding that seepage was a natural phenomenon in the Gulf.

Indeed, a breaking news headline across the web [reads](#):

“BP spokesman says seepage nearly 2 miles from its ruptured Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico is natural and is unrelated to the oil leak.”

As I [pointed out](#) on June 24th (and again [yesterday](#)):

The Washington Post made a very [important point](#) yesterday:

Bruce Bullock, director of the Maguire Energy Institute at Southern Methodist University, said additional leaks are a possible source of deep-sea plumes of oil detected by research vessels. But this part of the gulf is pocked with natural seeps, he noted. Conceivably the drilling of the well, and/or the subsequent blowout, could have affected the seeps, he said.

“Once you started disturbing the underground geology, you may have made one of those seeps even worse,” he said.

Remember that geologists have said that if the well casing is substantially breached, the oil and methane gas will find a way through fractures in the surrounding geology and make it into the ocean. For example, the Houston Chronicle [notes](#):

If the well casing burst it could send oil and gas streaming through the strata to appear elsewhere on the sea floor

Obviously, if there are natural oil or gas seeps nearby, there are already pre-existing channels up to the seafloor ... so that may very well be the path of least resistance for the subterranean oil to flow up to the seafloor.

Therefore, if there were a substantial breach in the well bore, nearby natural oil and gas seeps could very well increase in volume.

Because BP would like to [minimize leak estimates to minimize the damages it has to pay under the Clean Water Act](#), BP would undoubtedly try to pretend that the nearby natural seeps always had the same volume. In other words, the owner of the oil drilling prospect where the spill is occurring - BP - may be the only party to have mapped out the nearby seeps

So don't be surprised if - when formerly tiny seeps become gushers - BP tries to pretend that they were always that large.

Indeed - given BP's track record of prevarication - don't be shocked if BP pretends that brand new gushers are ancient, natural seeps.

Today, recently-retired Shell CEO John Hofmeister [told](#) MSNBC:

There are many people, including in the White House, including The Department of Energy, who doubt the integrity of the well casing [and] who believe that the well casing could well be ruptured or damaged in some respect and that could cause leaks way down in the well where oil could be... working its way out of the casing into the space between the wellbore and the casing itself.

That oil could be moving up the geology of the earth... and could be emerging somewhere as... the seepage ... the possible seepage.

Thad Allen said today that there are anomalies on the seafloor within 100-200 meters of the blown out well. And oil expert Bob Caverner told MSNBC today:

You know, these seeps that the admiral talked about within 100 meters of the well concern me some... The ones close really concern me.

And there is a possibility, if you look at the well diagram which is complicated and I won't get into it. There is a path for oil and gas to get out into the sub strata. And I'm concerned about that.

[Click here to watch video](#)

A 20-year petroleum geologist - with 13 years spent in offshore exploration in the Gulf of Mexico - "gasmiinder" [noted](#) yesterday:

Mapping of natural methane seeps is required as part of the process of obtaining a drilling permit in the Gulf of Mexico. This is required because the "methane seep communities" are considered environmental "havens" as it were - you have to demonstrate you're not disturbing the critters. [My comment: There are ecosystems which can [thrive](#) around small natural seeps. But huge gushers like the BP blow out can kill everything in sight, especially given the [large amounts of methane](#) which have spewed from BP's well]. The process does not measure the rate of seepage but you would have some guess based on the areal extent of the communities. This report is filed with the MMS and should be available. I'm surprised and enterprising reporter hasn't requested a copy from the MMS. (Of course enterprising reporter might be an oxymoron in the modern era)

I attended a scientific talk about 20 years ago where the study results estimated about 1 million barrels of oil a year seep into the Gulf from natural seeps. Of course that is spread over a huge area on an entire year.

In response to the above post, blogger CD [notes](#) that page 16 of BP's [Initial Exploration Plan](#) for the well states:

There is no evidence for the existence of high-density chemosynthetic communities within 1,500 ft of the proposed well location.

Gasmiinder [responds](#):

The statement regarding the chemosynthetic communities requires a seafloor survey - that's what I'm referring to where there will be a report available having mapped them (the partners will have copies of that report as well).

Gasmiinder [adds](#):

Here is a copy from the webpage of a company that consults on the interpretation of the hazard surveys. It should give at least a feel for the level of information that is believed to be present in the data (meaning this is what they claim to be able to accomplish with the datasets):

- Assess seafloor conditions and stratigraphy, and geologic processes to evaluate well site locations
- Identify shallow gas and shallow water flow potential [my note: they are referring to shallow layers that could be hazards to drill through]
- Interpret and map geologic constraints, such as faults, gas vents, seafloor depressions and mounds, and any other geologic phenomena that are detectable with seismic data
- Identify potential chemosynthetic communities, archaeological sites, and man-made infrastructure and debris
- Assess mooring spread, anchor locations, and foundation zones
- Produce supporting maps to show water depth, topography, shallow structure, and seafloor and shallow geologic conditions and features in an area that may have an impact on drilling
- Prepare final reports needed for permit application to governmental and insurance bodies

So BP (and its [partners](#) in the well, Anadarko and Mitsui) would have maps of all of the nearby seeps which were there before well blew out.

In addition, there are logs of where BP's underwater submersibles (ROVs) have traveled since they arrived at the scene. Tracking the logs would show whether any ROVs had visited the current seep before today. If so - and my hunch is that they have - then the corresponding footage would show how big those seeps were previously.

Indeed, enterprising citizen journalists who have recorded and stored the footage from BP's underwater cams could compare the compass readings from the [current feeds showing](#)

[seepage](#) to previous similar compass readings, and find the footage themselves.

NASA has also [demonstrated](#) that natural seeps show up in satellite images when photographed in sunlint. However, I am not sure whether the seep near the blown out well is big enough - or of the right chemical composition - to see from satellite images.

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