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BP's Macondo Gulf Oil Spill: The Public Was Misled. There Are THREE – Not One – Leaking Wellheads

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Washington's Blog

Theme: Environment

BP Had Pretended There Was Only 1 Wellhead

During the 2010 Gulf oil spill, BP talked about, filmed, and ultimately announced that it had capped ***one*** leaking wellhead.

But as we noted at the time:

> Matt Simmons was an energy adviser to President George W. Bush, is an adviser to the Oil Depletion Analysis Centre, and is a member of the National Petroleum Council and the Council on Foreign Relations. Simmons is chairman and CEO of ... an investment bank catering to oil companies.
>
> Simmons told Dylan Ratigan that "there's another leak, much bigger, 5 to 6 miles away" from the leaking riser and blowout preventer which we've all been watching on the underwater cameras:
>
> I have no idea whether or not Simmons is right. The government should immediately either debunk or admit his claim.
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>
> There is another possibility.
>
> It is well-known that there were previous accidents at the Deepwater Horizon rig. For example ... as 60 Minutes reports:
>
> > [Mike Williams, the chief electronics technician on the Deepwater Horizon, and one of the last workers to leave the doomed rig] says going faster caused the bottom of the well to split open, swallowing tools and that drilling fluid called "mud."
> >
> > "We actually got stuck. And we got stuck so bad we had to send tools down into the drill pipe and sever the pipe," Williams explained.
> >
> > **That well was abandoned and Deepwater Horizon had to drill a new route to the oil.**
>
> It is therefore possible that there has been another ongoing leak which BP has tried to cover up.

In 2010, we interviewed one of the world's leading experts on oil leaks, Robert Bea, and

asked him about the multiple well theory:

> Few people in the world know more about oil drilling disasters than Dr. Robert Bea.
>
> Bea teaches engineering at the University of California Berkeley, and has 55 years of experience in engineering and management of design, construction, maintenance, operation, and decommissioning of engineered systems including offshore platforms, pipelines and floating facilities. Bea has worked for many years in governmental and quasi-governmental roles, and has been a high-level governmental adviser concerning disasters. He worked for 16 years as a top mechanical engineer and manager for Shell Oil, and has worked with Bechtel and the Army Corps of Engineers. One of the world's top experts in offshore drilling problems, Bea is a member of the Deepwater Horizon Study Group, and has been interviewed by news media around the world concerning the BP oil disaster.
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> ***
>
> WB: The chief electronics technician on the Deepwater Horizon said that the Macondo well was originally drilled in **another location**, but that "going faster caused the bottom of the well to split open, swallowing tools", and that BP abandoned that well. You've spoken to that technician and looked into the incident, and concluded that "they damn near blew up the rig." [See this and this].
>
> Do you know where that abandoned well location is, and do you know if that well is still leaking?
>
> Bea: The abandoned well is very close to the current well location. BP had to file reports showing the location of the abandoned well and the new well [with the Minerals Management Service], so the location of the abandoned well is known.
>
> We don't know if the abandoned well is leaking.
>
> WB: Matthew Simmons talked about a second leaking well. There are rumors on the Internet that the original well is still leaking. Do you have any information that can either disprove or confirm that allegation?
>
> Bea: There are two uncorroborated reports. One is that there is a leak 400 feet West of the present well's surface location. There is another report that there is a leak several miles to the West.
>
> [Bea does not know whether either report is true at this time, because BP is not sharing information with the government, let alone the public.]

Subsequently petroleum industry geohazards engineer BK Lim claimed there were *3* leaking wells.

Friday, the government released new underwater video showing ***3*** wellheads at or near the Macondo reservoir:

- ROV Video of Well Head 1
- ROV Video of Well Head 2
- ROV Video of Well Head 3

These are not 3 different videos of the same wellhead. As the Coast Guard comments themselves state, and as apparent on the information contained on the videos themselves, these are 3 different wellheads in the Macondo 252 prospect.

We sent the new videos to Dr. Bea and asked him if the Deepwater Horizon Study Group knew there was more than one wellhead at the Macondo site.

Bea told us:

> The Deepwater Horizon Study Group was aware of two well heads … not three.
>
> For the DHSG, BK Lim – with a background in Gulf coast geology and petroleum engineering – (see internet links below) was the person who originally started chasing the multiple well heads after he obtained the GPS coordinates and checked with the well permit documents.
>
> During 2010, neither BP nor the USCG would confirm there was more than one well head location.
>
> It would be good if someone with GPS – GIS capabilities could develop a lease map that shows the three well head locations. A similar map is needed to locate all of the hardware that has been left on the sea floor in that area. I would hope that someone with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management would have developed this information.
>
> http://bklim.newsvine.com/_news/2010/07/30/4781973-why-is-bps-macondo-blowout-so-disastrous-beyond-patch-up
>
> http://bklim.newsvine.com/_news/2010/08/29/4994064-the-diagrammatic-illustration-that-says-it-all

Postscript: None of the new videos of the 3 wellheads show leaking oil. But BP's explanation for the new miles-long oil sheen makes no sense (and see this), and other explanations may make more sense.

One thing is certain. BP and the government should disclose all of the wells in the Macondo area, and a full survey should be done of the seafloor. As Dr. Bea previously told us:

> The search needs to be conducted like an archeological dig [using] a close-spaced grid of multiple surveys employing different detection equipment with accurate control of positions of the 'sensors'.
>
> When I worked for Shell on the Bay Marchand blowouts, we used geophysical 'sniffer' equipment to trace the oil in the water column….better than an ROV…..with the survey from the sea floor to the surface… from Bay Marchand to the Bay of Campechee.

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