

Camouflage and Contamination: What's Going On In The Gulf?

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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BP and the government decided that millions of gallons of dispersants should be dumped into the Gulf to sink and hide the oil.

They succeeded in sinking it. As [ABC](#), [CBS](#) and [NPR](#) note, huge quantities of oil are blanketing the ocean floor, killing virtually all of the sealife which lives there.

And giant [new underwater plumes](#) have been found in the water column itself.

But officials don't want to hear about them. As one member of the oil spill recovery team said:

"My biggest concern is there's [a plume of oil] five miles by 30 miles out there that was reported and no one responded. The Coast Guard said for days that they wanted to run tests, and if they don't test it when it's called in, they'll never find it"

But didn't the oil-eating microbes eat alot of the oil? No ... they [mainly ate gas](#).

And the oil is not staying underwater.

Oil is suddenly emerging in many parts of the Gulf.

Oil "patties", 1 to 3 inches across, have been discovered [floating along the seawall](#) in Alabama.

[16 miles of beaches in Louisiana](#) have been hit. And scientists [say](#) that the oil will arise and wash ashore in pulses, and will hit sensitive areas like [coastal marshes](#).

As the Christian Science Monitor [notes](#), oil can remain hidden under sand for decades:

Yet it takes only minutes of digging into the sand [at Louisiana's Grand Isle State Park] to reveal a menace that experts say **permanently threatens** this picturesque **landscape**: pools of crude oil lurking less than a foot below the surface. ...

Twenty-one years after the Valdez spill, oil remains submerged in the beaches

of Prince William Sound in Alaska.

The same is true in Massachusetts' Buzzards Bay, where a **1969** spill released 175,000 gallons of diesel fuel; **41 years later, sampling shows oil three to eight inches below the land's surface.**

Indeed, workers are just doing cosmetic clean-ups. They are [pressure washing rocks](#) with hot water so they look clean, just as they did with the Exxon Valdez spill. And the government's targets for "cleaning up" beaches is [very lax](#):

John Tarpley, chief scientific support coordinator for NOAA, says the agency's goal is to clean beaches so they have "1 percent of oil or less."

Oil that's left in the environment can also [seep into groundwater](#) used for drinking by Gulf coast residents.

As CNN [reports](#), we might be facing a worst-case scenario in Florida:

LARRY MCKINNEY, HARTE RESEARCH INST. FOR GULF OF MEXICO STUDIES: ... [T]hey do tend to support some of our **greatest concerns** about the fate of these underwater plumes that were discovered back in June, and that is that they could be picked up and this conveyor belt that is **upwelling** in Desoto Canyon and **bringing this oil from the deep waters up to the shallow**, and that **seems to be what the Florida State folks are saying.** ...

JOHN ROBERTS, CNN ANCHOR:... [T]he **USF study said, quote**, "These findings, although preliminary, suggest that **subsurface oil may be emerging on to the west Florida shelf through the Desoto Canyon.**" So this is **not just restricted to the extremely deep water. There's enough welling as you mentioned** before. How widespread could this become?

MCKINNEY: Well, it depends on how big those plumes are and how long they persist, but that **conveyer belt moves water rather quickly**. And so the fact that the Florida state folks are finding oil up on that shelf at the distance that they're finding it is **disturbing** from that regard. That means that that oil plume could be moving up on the shelf and that's sort of a **worst case scenario**. We would not like to see that at all.

While the government denies that they are connected with the oil spill, there have been [massive fishkills](#) in Louisiana. [Oil can be seen](#) at fishkill sites, and the EPA has [discovered](#) high levels of nickel near the biggest fishkill. There have also been kills of [starfish](#) and other sea animals, including whales and dolphins:

And see [this](#).

As I have previously noted, independent scientists state that the EPA's toxicity tests for the Gulf oil and dispersant were [a joke](#).

And as McClatchy [points out](#), the EPA's toxicity findings don't hold up in the real world:

[University of South Florida chemical oceanographer and lead scientist on the mission David Hollander's] team took **water samples** and **fed them to marine plankton** in experiments **onboard** the research vessel in August. Even in **greatly diluted** form, **a lower concentration than what the EPA considers acute toxicity, the oil in the water caused a toxic effect...**

The findings raised new questions about what concentrations and what compounds federal scientists should be concerned about, he said. "In spite of the low concentrations, **something is in there.**"

A marine biologist [warns](#) that in a worst-case scenario - the effects on the Gulf could be catastrophic:

[Marine biologist Edith] Widder, senior scientist and CEO at the Ocean Research and Conservation Association, compared the spill to pushing on a light switch. If the switch flips, she said, the rich diversity of species in the Gulf will be replaced by a system in which the only things able to survive are jellyfish and bacteria.

Instead of admitting that there is a problem, BP and the Coast Guard's spin doctors have come up with code words for oil: [instead of "oil sheen", they call it "fish oil"; instead of "oil mousse", they call it "algae"](#). And alot of black oily substances are just labeled "[mysteries](#)".

And fishermen, shrimpers and crabbers are still catching contaminated seafood, although the authorities [don't want to hear about it](#).

There have also been reports of continuing health problems in Gulf coast residents. See [this](#) and [this](#).

But at least BP has stopped spraying dispersant in the Gulf ... right?

Unfortunately, numerous vessel of opportunity program participants have said it is still being sprayed (see [this](#) and [this](#)). And there allegations have been [confirmed](#) by chemists and photographers.

Okay, but at least the well has been capped, so that no new oil flows into the Gulf ... right?

Its hard to know.

BP has shut off [16 out of 17](#) of its underwater cameras. The only remaining camera shows a small - but continuous - stream of leaking materials:

There are still problems with the well. See [this](#), [this](#), and [this](#), and Admiral Thad Allen is now saying that the relief well might not be completed until [October](#).

But remember, one of the world's top oil industry accident experts [says](#) that the well may never be killed.

I hope and pray that the relief well is successful. But if there were insurmountable problems in capping the well, do you think we would hear about it before the November elections?

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