

COVERUP AND DENIAL: America's Gulf Disaster Revisited

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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April 20 marked the two year anniversary of BP's Gulf of Mexico disaster. Until Fukushima Daiichi's catastrophic nuclear meltdown, it was the largest ever environmental calamity.

It's devastated the lives of millions of area residents. It contaminated America's Gulf. Nothing in it's safe to eat. The incident's been plagued by coverup, denial, and Obama administration complicity to assure nothing slows hazardous deep water drilling.

In 2010, as disastrous conditions unfolded, Dahr Jamail reported firsthand from the Gulf. He's now discussing the aftermath. On April 18, he headlined, "Gulf seafood deformities alarm scientists," saying:

"Eyeless shrimp and fish with lesions are becoming common, with BP oil pollution believed to be the likely cause."

He quoted Louisiana State University's Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences Dr. Jim Cowan saying:

"And in my 20 years working on red snapper, looking at somewhere between 20 and 30,000 fish, I've never seen anything like this either."

He's not alone. Gulf fishermen, seafood processors, and other scientists report "disturbing numbers of mutated shrimp, crab and fish that they believe are deformed by chemicals released during BP's 2010 oil disaster."

"Along with collapsing fisheries, signs of malignant impact on the regional ecosystem are ominous: horribly mutated shrimp, fish with oozing sores, underdeveloped blue crabs lacking claws, eyeless crabs and shrimp - and interviewees' fingers point towards BP's oil pollution disaster as being the cause."

Jamail also cited concerns about continued Macondo well leakage. Overhead flights show large oil sheen covered areas. Evidence confirms it's from Macondo. What began two years ago didn't end. "Experts believe" seabed seepage is responsible.

Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) data confirm highly toxic BP oil still contaminates the Gulf. Affected residents experience it harmful effects.

Seepage is common wherever offshore drilling occurs. According to University of California's Ira Leifer, "From what I've seen, this new oil and sheen definitely seemed larger than typical natural (Gulf) seepages...."

BP, of course, denies it's from Macondo. Throughout 2010, the company misreported repeatedly. Initially it said 1,000 barrels a day were leaking, then 5,000, then larger volumes still well below actual amounts. Estimates ranged up to 100,000 or more daily barrels.

For months, company officials grossly downplayed the severity of the crisis. Coverup and denial continues. Contaminated areas are vast. America's Gulf may never fully recover. Neither will millions of area residents.

On April 20, the Institute for Southern Studies (ISS) headlined, "Troubled Waters: Gulf communities still reeling two years into BP disaster," saying:

BP claims recovery's on the way. Hard evidence proves otherwise. A new ISS report's titled, "Troubled Waters: Two Years After the BP Oil Disaster, a Struggling Gulf Coast Calls for National Leadership for Recovery," saying:

Area residents report oil still washing up on Gulf shores. Without help, affected people and communities face challenges likely too great to overcome.

Gulfport, MS community leader Derrick Evans addressed BP's April 2012 shareholders meeting. "The oil is not gone," he said. "The general perception is that BP made a mess and BP did a big cleanup and everything is all fine. Nothing could be further from the truth."

Two years later, the reality facing Gulf residents is sobering and disturbing. Their struggle to overcome what BP wrought continues. Economic hardships persist. So do serious health problems.

Some communities lost their way of life entirely. Others face uncertain futures. Many residents are sick and depressed. They've gotten precious little help. ISS produced its report cooperatively with Bridge the Gulf Project and the Gulf Coast Fund. They focused on three areas in particularly hard hit communities:

(1) Making a living

Thousands of fishing boats were idled. Many over-indebted fishermen shut down entirely. Local groups try helping best they can. They need federal and BP help not forthcoming.

(2) Restoring the coast

Every hour, Louisiana "loses a football-field sized chunk of coast land" from erosion and "energy industry activity." Residents need federal help restoring their fragile coastline.

(3) Protecting public health

Residents report alarming numbers and types of illnesses. Clearly they're toxic oil and dispersants related. Organizations like the Louisiana Environmental Action Network try to help. It's not enough. Much more is needed.

Overall, recovery is an unfulfilled dream. Achieving it's barely begun. BP turns a blind eye. Washington largely does the same. The suffering of millions persists.

The Government Accountability Project (GAP) "promote(s) government accountability....protect(s) whistleblowers, advanc(es) free speech, and empower(s) citizen

activists.”

Since 1977, it's been “the nation's leading whistleblower protection and advocacy organization.” It's also on the BP story. It's been investigating it since last summer. Whistleblowers report disastrous health tragedies.

Sometime this summer, GAP will release its report on how bad. Numerous ailments are known. Many thousands experience everything from skin irritation, vomiting, and rectal bleeding to kidney, liver, central nervous system and brain damage, hypertension, miscarriages, birth defects, and lesions.

Expect an eventual epidemic of cancers and other serious diseases. Expect pathetically little federal or BP help. The oil giant's settlement provides no healthcare. Accepting it means foregoing the right to sue.

Pursuing legal redress means years of delays, obstruction, appeals, and other ways clever lawyers use to deny just compensation.

BP's legacy will linger for decades. Peoples' lives were irreparably harmed. Environmental contamination is severe. Crude oil alone harms human health. Corexit dispersants contain hazardous carcinogens like 2-BTE (2-butoxyethanol).

Dangers they pose depend on length and amount of exposure. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and infirm are most vulnerable. No one's immune. Drinking toxic water or eating contaminated seafood assures any number of current and future health problems.

Blame it on America's rage to drill and irresponsible oil giants like BP. They do it recklessly with no regard for worker safety, environmental protection, or human health.

The company's known for having the industry's worst safety and environmental record. It's responsible for numerous willful negligence incidents. Some cause deaths and injuries. All harm human health and are environmentally destructive.

Only profits matter, not social responsibility or legal obligations. BP's a serial scofflaw. Regulatory laxity and political Washington complicity let it pollute freely with impunity. Once a violator, always one, and it goes way beyond BP. America's a scofflaw's paradise.

On April 19, investigative journalist Greg Palast headlined, “BP Covered Up Blow-out Two Years Prior to Deadly Deepwater Horizon Spill,” saying:

Eco-Watch.org “located an eyewitness with devastating new information” about BP covering up a Caspian Sea blowout. Rig workers back the account.

At issue was cutting corners irresponsibly. Coverup let BP replicate its shortcut in America's Gulf. In September 2008, BP's first blowout occurred off Baku, Azerbaijan's coast.

Witnesses told Palast they were evacuated from BP's platform as it filled with dangerous methane. They confirmed:

“(T)here was mud (drill-pipe cement) blown out all over the platform.” The cement cap couldn't hold high-pressure gases. They “engulfed the entire platform in methane gas.”

Palast learned that “BP failed to notify the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) about the failure of the cement....Notification would have alerted Gulf cement contractor Halliburton that the process of adding nitrogen to cement posed unforeseen dangers.”

Cement casing cracked apart in the Caspian. BP promoted “Blow-Out Preventers (BOPs) as a last line of defense in case of a blow-out. But if the casing shatters, the BOPs could be useless.”

BP went to “extraordinary lengths” to conceal the first incident. Revealing would show replicating it in the Gulf was “not an unexpected accident but could be considered negligent homicide.”

BP buys politicians. It also intimidates employees. An atmosphere of fear prevails. Speaking out ends careers. Few dare.

EcoWatch editor Stefanie Penn Spear said BP negligence caused the “biggest oil spill in US history. It entirely turned the Gulf Coast economy upside down and threatened—and continues to threaten—the health and livelihoods of the people in the Gulf region.”

How can something this major be concealed, asked Palest. He cites “pay-offs, threats, political muscle and the connivance of the Bush Administration’s State Department, Exxon and Chevron.” Obama officials bear equal guilt.

New York Times contributor Abrahm Lustgarten’s op-ed calls BP’s Gulf disaster “A Stain That Won’t Wash Away,” saying:

Accountability’s been entirely lacking. Future incidents are assured. Minor fines at most are imposed. Criminal prosecutions don’t happen. Warnings issued are toothless.

Scofflaws are free to pollute and harm human health. One disaster follows another. Only profits matter. Recidivism is commonplace. A culture of irresponsibility assures it. So doesn’t bipartisan political complicity.

“What the gulf spill has taught us is that no matter how bad the disaster (and the environmental impact), the potential consequences have never been large enough to dissuade BP (or giants in all industries) from placing profits ahead of prudence.”

As long as Washington remains corporate occupied territory, nothing ahead will change. Big money runs America. What it says goes. Politicians and regulators salute and obey. It’s the American way.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

Also visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com and listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network Thursdays at 10AM US Central time and Saturdays and Sundays at noon. All programs are archived for easy listening.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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