

Environmental catastrophe in the Gulf: The spilled oil has settled on the ocean floor

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, November 25, 2010

News Herald 25 November 2010

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

PANAMA CITY — The oil is still there, sitting at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and causing damage to the environment, a Florida State University professor who studies greenhouse gases, oceans and energy said Tuesday.

Professor Jeff Chanton compared natural oil seepage in the Gulf of Mexico to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. About 1,000 natural ocean-floor leaks combine to trickle about 400,000 barrels of oil into the Gulf each year, Chanton said, but scientists estimate as many as 60,000 barrels of oil poured into the Gulf each day of the spill.

“While natural seepage is a normal process, what happened this summer was totally overwhelming,” Chanton said.

The professor said he thinks most of that Deepwater Horizon oil — as much as 70 percent to 79 percent of it — sank to the ocean floor, where it remains, sucking up oxygen and inhibiting life.

He and his colleagues are working to determine how that layer of sludge might affect the Gulf and how long it might take for the ecosystem to recover.

“But this is going to be a really hard thing to measure,” he said. “It’s likely that there will be this small, incremental degradation, but it occurs on such a slow scale, and human lives are so short, that people won’t notice it. It’s going to be anecdotal — people will say, ‘Oh, the fishing’s not as good as it used to be.’ ”

Scientists will need money to conduct that research, he added. He’s hoping some money BP is expected to pay in fines will be tucked away in a trust fund for long-term studies.

“The law says BP has to restore things to the way they were, but we don’t even really know how things were,” Chanton added. “It’ll probably be 10 years before we really know the effects.”

Dave Lobell, a self-employed engineer, said he sat in on the lecture to pick up professional development hours and also because he was interested in the topic.

“It was very informative,” Lobell said, although he added that he thought Chanton’s political views were evident in the lecture and that he didn’t necessarily agree with the professor. Besides talking about the oil spill, Chanton also discussed global warming and his opposition to offshore drilling.

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