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Oil Spill Might Be Making Natural Seeps Larger

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The deep sea subs have found other leaks a couple of miles from BP's gushing blowout preventer and riser.

For example, the Houston Chronicle noted on June 21st:

> A report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Monday noted research vessels found natural gas seeping from the sea floor several miles away from the well.

While many might be quick to take this as confirmation of Matt Simmons' claims that there is another leak directly caused by the sinking of the drilling rig, the Chronicle goes on to explain:

> Those appear to be pre-existing seeps that occur naturally, a NOAA spokeswoman said, and unrelated to the spill.

But 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 occuring – BP – may be the only party to have mapped out the nearby seeps (Anadarko and Mitsui were partners with BP in the oil prospect; but – as passive partners – they probably didn't take a hands-on approach to such details).

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.

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