

VIDEO: New Giant Oil Plume Discovered in Gulf

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A new oil plume, 22 miles in length, has been discovered below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico, and stretches from the leaking BP wellhead northeast toward Mobile Bay, Alabama.

Marine scientists aboard the [Weatherbird II](#) have discovered what they believe is a massive new oil plume situated in deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The plume is located just beneath the surface down to a depth of 3,300 feet, with the greatest concentration of hydrocarbons at about 1,300 feet, suggesting the highest levels of environmental pollution from the BP disaster may be located out of sight in the Gulf's deep waters.

The scientists estimate the newest plume to be 22 miles long by 6 miles wide and fear it is the result of BP's unprecedented use of chemical dispersants applied subsurface at the well site.

David Hollander, associate professor of chemical oceanography at USF and lead investigator of the research mission, said the oil they tested is no longer visible, dissolving into the water and raising more fears that oil combined with dispersant toxicity may lead to a dangerous situation for fish larvae and other creatures that filter ocean water for food.

Where [the first significant oil plume](#) was discovered southwest of the explosion site and headed toward open waters, the newest oil plume is believed to be headed inland toward shallower waters that are a reproductive area for many fish and ocean species.

According to the [Maddux News Wire](#), Hollander said: "Our concern regarding these contaminants is they have the potential to be incorporated in the food web."

He added: "The first ecological impact of this spill is the effect on coastal habitats, including marshes, beaches and estuaries. The second threat to nature would be the impact on the food webs. That is what's at risk."

The research vessel used a series of technologies to help determine their preliminary findings: a CDOM Fluorometer, the ship's sonar and the ship's gliders which assess water conditions as the ship moves through the water column.

The Weatherbird II, a research vessel in the University of South Florida's College of Marine Science program, is scheduled to return from its most recent mission to its home port of St. Petersburg, Florida on Friday morning. Confirmation testing will begin after that time.

Estimates by government scientists have cast doubt on BP's ongoing assertion of 5,000 barrels of crude escaping from a ruptured pipe on the seafloor.

Two teams of scientists, [the Mass Balance Team and the Plume Modeling Team](#), have been assembled by the US government to estimate the flow of crude oil from the wellhead. Their preliminary numbers indicate that flow is 2 1/2 to five times greater than BP and Coast Guard estimates. If so, that means between 504,000 to more than a million gallons per day of crude has been pouring into the Gulf since the disaster began on April 20.

In total numbers, that equates between 18 million and 39 million gallons of oil has contaminated the Gulf's waters and coastal shorelines, far surpassing the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill of almost 11 million gallons. The two teams used differing methods to determine their calculations and have come up with similar numbers, according to the [Associated Press](#).

In a belated effort at shoring up unfavorable poll numbers, President Obama is scheduled to visit the Gulf coast region on Friday, only his second visit to the area since the Deepwater debacle began five weeks ago. According to [Reuters](#), Obama is headed to the region "to assert control over the largest oil spill in US history."

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