

Will BP Skip the Relief Well, Declare Mission Accomplished, and Abandon Ship Without Permanently Killing the Oil Leak?

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Yesterday, I [pointed out](#) that - while everyone is claiming that the oil well has been capped - it hasn't really been capped.

AP is [reporting](#):

BP, U.S. mull whether to skip 'bottom kill'

The federal government and BP have recently raised the possibility that they won't need to perform the operation at all, since the well was plugged last month with mud and cement pumped in through the top.

Bottom kill is, of course, just another phrase for the relief wells.

Oil industry expert Robert Cavnar has a must-read [piece](#) today on the situation:

For the last several days, I've been trying to figure out what BP is doing and what is the actual condition of BP's MC252 well after their "static kill" and cementing procedure last week apparently didn't work. You'll recall that when [BP's] Kent Wells announced this procedure, he actually used the words "killed" and "dead".

To add to the argument to go ahead with the kill, Adm. Allen said in his July 22nd briefing:

"We have a pressure head up there that would help us now fill the top part of the well with mud. That would actually **ultimately enhance the relief well effort** that would take place five to seven days later." (emphasis added)

On August 2nd and 3rd, BP ran the "static kill" pumping 2,300 barrels of mud. Early in the morning on the 4th, BP issued a press release saying the the well had reached a "static condition" with well pressure "controlled by the hydrostatic pressure of the drilling mud." In his McBriefing later that day, Wells actually said that when they pumped the mud, they could actually see it go into the reservoir by pressures, and that they pumped up to 15 barrels per

minute. They studiously avoided the terms “dead” and “killed”. During the briefing, Wells also said:

“And what we - what we’re doing now is, every six hours, we just inject a little more mud into the well, just to continue to give ourselves confidence that we can do that, keep our equipment live, and we’re seeing a **very, very static set of conditions** as we continue to monitor the pressure, which is all very encouraging.” (emphasis added)

With all the encouraging signs, [U.S. Secretary of Energy] Steve Chu approved pumping cement, which they did on the 5th. In a briefing on the 6th, Doug Suttles declared victory, say that the “...cement job is performing as expected”. He also said that they pumped 500 barrels of cement, leaving about 200 inside the casing.

All was right with the world. Except, it wasn’t. Day before yesterday, Adm. Allen announced they were going to start a “pressure test”, babbling about the annulus and raising the ominous spectre that they are still actually communicating to the reservoir. Wells confirmed that fear in the afternoon, admitting that they indeed had 4,200 psi on the well when it’s supposed to be dead. At the seafloor, the well should have no more than 2,200 psi on it, and conceivable less, if the hydrostatic of the mud in the closed well had overcome reservoir pressure. Then it got really confusing. Wells said that it wouldn’t hold 4,200 psi because of “bubbles” leaking out of the wellhead, implying that they are pumping on it to keep it there, but that they’re going to “test” it by relieving pressure. ?? Also, the more Adm. Allen explains what’s going on, the more the press gets confused. Hell, I understand this business and I’m confused.

To add to the jumble, Adm Allen said this in his briefing yesterday:

“Sure, there’s a very low probability that we might have actually sealed the annulus with the cement that came down the pipe casing and came back up around it. What we want to do is understand whether or not there’s what we call free communication. In other words whether there, the hydrocarbons in the reservoir can actually come up through the annulus outside the casing, if that’s the case when we go in and we drill in we put the mud and cement we’re just going to drive that down and seal the well. OK? If there’s cement there and there’s no communication that means we have what we call stagnate oil trapped around that casing up to the well head. If you go in and you start pumping mud and cement in there the chances are you could raise the pressure and push that up into the blow out preventer. And that’s a very low possibility, low probability event but we want to, we want to test the pressure in the blow out preventer and see if we actually have pressure coming up that would indicate that we have free communication with the reservoir. If not that would change our tactics and how we do the final kill.”

Clear as drilling mud. What’s going on here is that the “static kill” looks like it did the opposite of what BP and Allen had suggested at the beginning. It certainly hasn’t accelerated the relief well. To the contrary, it has caused interminable delays. As a matter of fact, since July 13, the DDIII has only drilled

70 or 80 feet and set one string of casing. With all of the shut downs for the “well integrity test”, then the “well injectivity test”, then the “static kill” plus cementing, they haven’t been able to get much work done for a month, especially with the 2 weather delays.

The mis-information and confusion is also taking its toll. I got asked in an interview yesterday that since the well is “dead” now, why are they bothering with the relief well? AP reported last night that BP and the government are contemplating skipping the bottom kill. Every time Wells, Suttles, or Allen get in front of a microphone, everyone gets even more confused, mis-informed, or both; everyone just wants this to go away, but it’s not going away; not until the relief well kills from the bottom as we’ve been saying for over 3 months.

In actuality, this “static kill” did nothing that BP and Allen said it would do. Certainly the well is not dead or “static”. It hasn’t accelerated the relief well, but it has obscured the well’s pressures, making it more difficult to kill. Hence, these new tests to figure out what’s going on. BP and the government don’t really have a clue where the 2,300 barrels of mud and 500 barrels of cement went. They originally claimed it all went down the casing and out to the reservoir. I would set the probability of that actually having happened at zero. Here’s why: The positive test on the casing the night of the blowout was rock solid. The casing was good. It is possible that they may have collapsed the production casing during the blowout, but that would have been relatively high up in the wellbore, probably where they had displaced with seawater on the inside. If that happened, it would be communicated with the backside. In addition, at the bottom of the production casing is a float shoe, 134 feet of cement in the shoe track, then a float collar, then 2 cementing plugs with probably cement on top of those. Oh, and don’t forget about the 3,000 feet of drill pipe hanging inside all of that. There is no way, unless that entire float assembly blew off, that they pumped down the casing and up the backside. On top of all that, there are HUGE lost circulation zones both below and above the reservoir. During drilling they lost 3,000 barrels of mud trying to drill that last section.

So, where did all the mud and cement go? It likely went down the backside of the production casing and either out through some damage that was caused during the aborted top kill, or out the lost circulation zone right below the 9 7/8” liner at 17,100. The fact that they’re getting pressure now tells me that they are indeed communicated to the reservoir below, probably obscured by the fact that they now have mud strung through the annulus. If they are indeed communicated, pressure will build on the wellhead, which is exactly what’s happening. Adm. Allen pledged to get BP to release the pressure data 3 days ago. The next day, when asked about it, he said it was released, but “nobody can find it.” The data is still AWOL.

So, now, here we sit, waiting on weather again, and then we’re going to pressure test a well that’s supposed to be dead instead of getting the relief well finished. The press is confused; the public is bored.

BP has tried to cover up every aspect of the spill. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).

The bottom kill – the procedure which all oil industry experts agree has the best chance of killing the leak – hasn’t yet been performed. The underwater cameras [still show](#) methane and oil leaking into the Gulf.

And yet the country’s attention is already drifting away from the Gulf and to celebrities, stocks, and other issues.

I'm beginning to wonder whether BP keeps on doing one confusing procedure after another, and keeps on saying that the well has been capped, hoping that everyone stops paying attention so that BP can just pack up its bags and slink away while people aren't paying attention.

Relief wells are the best hope for permanently capping the well. But it is possible that BP has messed up the well so badly that [the relief wells will fail](#).

As Cavnar [notes](#), BP has already taken down or blurred most of its underwater camera feeds. BP might just declare "mission accomplished" and skip the relief wells, leaving a ticking time bomb which will pollute the Gulf [for years to come](#).

Note: I hope that BP and the government do complete the relief wells next week after the tropical storm passes. I am not predicting that BP will skip the bottom kill ... I am only warning that they are considering it, and am writing this so people can put pressure on BP and the government to complete both relief wells.

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