

# **BP and Administration Lies, Deceit and Coverup in the Gulf**

**by Stephen Lendman**  
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From the start, Obama administration and BP officials lied and deceived the public about the Gulf spill's severity, BP CEO Tony Hayward saying (on May 18) its environmental effect will be "very modest," when, in fact, it's already catastrophic, spreading, causing long-term or permanent ecological destruction over a vast area, will likely persist for months, and, according to some experts perhaps years if nothing tried to stop it works.

Initially, BP reported a 1,000 barrels per day leak, then 5,000 after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) estimate, while independent analysis of company supplied video and satellite imagery suggest somewhere between 50 - 100,000 barrels, the consensus settling on 70,000 or an Exxon Valdez equivalent every 3.5 days - by far, America's greatest ever environmental disaster, worsening daily.

On May 19, McClatchy Newspapers Marisa Taylor and Renee Schoof headlined, "BP Withholds Oil Spill Facts - and Government Lets It," saying:

It "hasn't publicly divulged the results of tests on the extent of workers' exposure to evaporating oil or from the burning of crude....even though researchers say that data is crucial in determining whether the conditions are safe."

Further, BP isn't monitoring conditions or releasing videos, and the Obama administration isn't pressing it despite experts, like University of Miami's fisheries biologist Peter Ortner saying "We have been screaming from day one for" it.

Meanwhile, University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science's satellite imagery analysis reported on May 18 that the spill covers 7,500 square miles, or about the size of New Jersey. Other accounts say 10,000 square miles or a Maryland equivalent. Either way, it's huge.

On May 19, McClatchy Newspaper writers Renee Schoof and Lauren French headlined, "Gulf oil spill may be 19 times bigger than originally thought," saying:

New video footage "indicates that around 95,000 barrels, or 4 million gallons, a day of crude oil may be spewing from the leaking wellhead," according to Purdue University's Professor Steve Wereley's May 19 testimony to the House Commerce and Energy Committee. He based his calculation on BP video, saying the spill could be from 76,000 - 104,000 barrels daily, but wants more footage over a longer period for a more precise calculation, what BP hasn't released up to now and won't, absent Interior Department pressure to do it.

Yet if the wellhead fails completely, these figures potentially could double, begging the question about how long Washington, BP, and the major media can deny the peril, pretending it's minor.

Wereley said the "media keeps using the 5,000 (figure), but there is scientifically" no basis for its accuracy. "BP's estimate is nowhere near correct. It is certainly larger." He sees no "possibility (under) any scenario (that the publicized) number is accurate," imagine how much less so under a worst case scenario.

On May 14, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) "filed a formal notice of intent to sue Interior Secretary Ken Salazar for ignoring marine-mammal protection laws when approving offshore drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico."

Salazar's Interior Department approved "three lease sales, more than 100 seismic surveys, and more than 300 drilling operations without permits required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act."

According to CBD's oceans director, Miyoko Sakashita:

On Salazar's watch, the Gulf was treated "as a sacrifice area where laws are ignored and wildlife protection takes a backseat to oil-company profits." The Interior Department "is well aware of its obligations under the law....yet it has simply decided it cannot be bothered. You and I have to follow the law, but Interior Secretary Salazar seems to think that he and the oil companies he is supposedly overseeing do not. That is unacceptable."

CBD is suing Salazar and the Minerals Management Service (MMS) for flagrantly violating the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act. Hundreds of individual and class action ones have begun coming against BP, Transocean, Halliburton and their complicit corporate partners for compensatory and punitive damages, but whatever their resolutions, they'll never compensate for lost livelihoods, destroyed lives, and environmental devastation that courts can't redress.

Of course, the problem goes back decades and was extreme under the Bush-Cheney White House, run by former oil men who cared only about profits, and didn't give a damn about the environment. Neither does Obama and his corporate-controlled administration.

In 2007, Bush's Interior Department sold BP the affected lease under its 2007 - 2012 Five-Year Offshore Oil Drilling Plan. In April 2009, the Obama administration approved exploratory drilling, after which CBD and its allies won a court order vacating the Bush Five-Year Plan.

Rather than seek an alternative, Interior Secretary Salazar filed a special motion to exempt approved Gulf sites, identifying BP's as one to be allowed. In July 2009, the court agreed, despite BP having the worst environmental and safety records of any company operating in America.

No matter. It downplayed a spill possibility, saying it was unlikely or virtually impossible. MMS then rubber-stamped its exploration plan with no environmental consideration. In other words, it should never deter business or stand in the way of profits - the same attitude shown Wall Street, corporate health providers, and other corporate favorites given generous legislative or direct handouts.

As a result, regular large and smaller spills are assured, heavy oil from this one having reached the fragile Louisiana marshlands - nurseries for shrimp, oysters, crabs, and fish that make Louisiana America's leading commercial seafood producer and a favorite tourist destination for recreational anglers.

Oil also now affects the South Pass Mississippi River entrance, the Mississippi delta, Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island, Alabama, Whiskey Island on the Chandeleur Islands south end, the protected bird breeding sanctuary Raccoon Island, and the Loop Current, a powerful clockwise conveyor belt heading it toward Florida, up the East Coast, and into the Atlantic, threatening Western Europe and perhaps West Africa. The potential devastation is incalculable but at minimum will be huge.

According to European Space Agency satellite images, visible proof shows its position, suggesting it'll reach the Keys around May 25, America's only living coral barrier reef - the world's third most productive marine ecosystem with its patch and bank reefs, seagrass meadows, soft and hard bottom communities, and coastal mangroves. They support one of North America's most biologically diverse amounts of marine life, endangering them, according to Dr. Hu Chuamin, executive director of the Institute for Marine Remote Sensing (IMaRS) at the University of South Florida.

An optical oceanographic expert, he says there's "no doubt that (oil) will reach the Florida Keys. (Advancing about 100 miles a day), we know that (Mississippi Rivers waters are heading for) the Florida Straits and will impact the Keys." Once there, major damage is likely to an ecosystem providing shelter, food and breeding sites for many plants and animals as well as coastal storm protection. According to Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, reefs also help the state's economy through millions of dollars annually from recreational and commercial fishing.

No one knows the potential damage, but if oil flows over the reef, the amount will depend on whether it stays on the surface. According to Eugene Shinn, recently retired US Geologic Service reef ecology expert, "Under no circumstances should dispersants be used on an oil slick in the vicinity of a coral reef." They would cause oil droplets to sink and potentially destroy tiny coral polyps.

Worse still, the Loop Current joins the Gulf Stream, North America's most important ocean current system, sparking fears about oil entering it and traveling up the entire East Coast into the Atlantic. En route, it could foul beaches, mangroves, sea-grass, and coral reefs, vital to area wildlife, local economies and human health, besides crossing the Atlantic for more damage.

Earlier, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) head ,Jane Lubchenco, told reporters that an "unprecedented and dynamic" slick was on course to sweep along Florida's coastline, was "increasingly likely" to reach the powerful Gulf Loop, then be carried to the Keys and beyond.

No doubt to prevent his congressional testimony, MMS associate director of Offshore Energy and Minerals Management, Chris Oynes, will take an accelerated retirement May 31. He got his position despite being key to an offshore leasing foul-up, costing taxpayers an estimated \$10 billion in lost revenue - the Interior Department's inspector general calling his mismanagement "a jaw-dropping example of bureaucratic bungling."

So bad, in fact, he got a better job to rubber-stamp BP's right to operate recklessly, wreck the environment, and reward it shareholders with billions in profits. Maybe a new high-paying job as well, the usual revolving door payoff for allies leaving government service.

## **BP's Criminal Negligence**

Besides lying, covering up, and deceiving all along, BP knew the vital blowout preventer was damaged weeks before the spill, yet did nothing to fix it, according to a May 17 Judith Evans Timesonline report headlined, "BP pressured rig disaster workers to drill faster," saying:

According to chief electronics technician Mike Williams, one of the last workers to leave the doomed platform, the blowout preventer was "damaged when a crewman accidentally moved a joystick, applying hundreds of thousands of pounds of force. Pieces of rubber were found in the

drilling fluid, which he said implied damage to a crucial seal. But a supervisor declared the find to be 'not a big deal.' "

Engineering Professor Bob Bea disagreed, telling 60 Minutes that inaccurate pressure readings followed. The real situation was concealed. The rig no longer was safe, and without blowout preventer protection, "a catastrophic accident like the Gulf oil spill" might happen.

Bea also said BP ignored an even more critical safety measure, ordering the rig operator to remove the "drilling mud," the heavy liquid used before the well was sealed to keep oil and gas from escaping.

MMS drilling engineer Frank Patton calls drilling mud "the most important thing in safety for your well." Explosion eyewitnesses, including nearby fishermen, saw it being extracted beforehand. BP told rig workers that "things" were plugged when, in fact, final cementing wasn't in place. Without it and the drilling mud, an operable blowout preventer was the last line of defense. Drilling without it was willful criminal negligence.

So wasn't the whole operation, approved by Obama's Interior Department, including EPA's authorizing the use of toxic dispersants, causing more problems than solutions to the environment, wildlife, affected residents, and fishermen hired as first responders, already getting sick.

BP said respirators and other special protections weren't needed, despite strong hydrocarbon vapors and massive toxic chemical amounts dumped on the slick to make it more water soluble.

As a result, fishermen report bad headaches, burning eyes, persistent coughs, sore throats, stuffy sinuses, nausea, and dizziness – unsurprising based on EPA monitored unsafe airborne levels of dangerous hydrogen sulfide, benzene and

other toxins, way exceeding acceptable standards for humans and wildlife.

BP and Washington ignore them, risking chemical poisoning to show up later in long-term illnesses, disabilities and deaths, what happened to Exxon Valdez and 9/11 first responders, never told of the dangers they faced. Again, expediency and corporate interests trump environmental considerations, public health, worker safety, and common sense - swept aside by Washington-BP collusion.

On May 20, with over 600,000 gallons of surface dispersants used and another 55,000 underwater, the EPA told BP officials to choose less toxic ones in 24 hours, submit a list of alternatives, then begin using them within 72 hours.

According to Washington Post writer Juliet Eilperin (on May 20) in her article titled, "EPA demands less-toxic dispersant: "

An unnamed administration official said "Dispersants have never been used in this volume before," let alone ones as toxic as Nalco's Corexit 9500A and 9527A.

Nalco is well-connected, having formed a joint venture with Exxon Chemical in 1994, has oil-industry insiders on its board, including an 11-year BP board member. No wonder Defenders of Wildlife's senior policy advisor, Richard Charter, calls Corexit "a chemical that the oil industry makes to sell to itself, basically." Only profits matter, not long-term harm to people, wildlife and the environment.

### **Washington Coverup of a Massive Underwater Oil Blob**

According to investigative journalist Wayne Madsen in his May 20 article headlined, "White House Covers Up Menacing Oil 'Blob:' "



FEMA and US Army Corps of Engineer sources say that "US Navy submarines (in the Gulf and Atlantic off the Florida coast) have detected (and are tracking) what amounts to a frozen oil blob....at depths of between 3,000 to 4,000 feet. (It's now) transiting the Florida Straits between Florida and Cuba (and parts of it) are breaking off into smaller tar balls that are now washing ashore in the environmentally-sensitive Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas."

Lies and coverup try to hide it, Madsen saying NOAA operates as a "virtual public relations arm for BP," and the Coast Guard is "lying in order to protect the Obama administration" to limit its damaged image.

Six months ago, without federally required permits, the BP/Transocean/Halliburton troika drilled a 35,000 foot well, causing "a major catastrophic event that required the firms' oil rig personnel to quickly pull up the drill and close (its) hole."

Even so, BP "re-sank the drill (causing) another, more destructive chain of events following the (Deepwater Horizon) explosion....When (it) blew up, (it) also 'blew down,' cracking the sub-seabed pipe" as deep as 30,000 feet, "again, without a government permit."

BP also wants to recover "as much oil as possible from the (site) rather than simply plugging and capping (it), which would then place it off-limits to further drilling."

Company officials are deceiving the Obama administration and public about their so-called "kill shot" or "top kill" plan to permanently seal the well. Instead, they intend "to shoot cement into the pipe in an attempt to cap" it temporarily, later hoping to dig "a trench for side drilling (to) recover as much oil as possible," no matter the risk of an even greater disaster that won't deter their quest for profits.

## **The Exxon Valdez Connection**

Greg Palast's Exxon Valdez fraud investigations found BP mostly to blame, a topic his May 5 Truthout.org article explained, titled "Slick Operator: The BP I've Known Too Well."

What the company did to Alaska, it's now doing to the Gulf, and a vastly greater ecosystem under a worst case scenario. "Tankers run aground, wells blow out, pipes burst. It shouldn't happen, but it does (after which) the name of the game is containment," coverup, and spending the least amount possible for cleanup and restitution.

In Alaska and today, BP "was charged with carrying out the Oil Spill Response Plans (it) drafted....filed with the government, and is handling the same way by "l(ying), prevaricat(ing), fabricat(ing) and obfuscat(ing)."

Spills are contained with "lot('s) of rubber, long skirts of it called a 'boom' (used to) surround (them), then pump (them) out into skimmers, or disperse it, sink it or burn it."

However, "booms" have to be ready to respond like a fire department's equipment and personnel to operate it. In Alaska, it was BP's job as principal Alyeska pipeline consortium owner - its same job in the Gulf as principal Deepwater Horizon lessee.

In 1989, Alyeska claimed that equipment and response crews were in place with trained Alaskan natives ready if needed. It also "certified in writing that a containment barge with equipment was within five hours sailing of any point in the Prince William Sound, (and that) it had plenty of boom and equipment cached on Bligh Island, where the Exxon Valdez hit Bligh Reef.

In fact, it had nothing there, and Alyeska earlier fired Alaskan workers, "replacing them with phantom crews, lists of untrained employees with no idea how to control a spill. And the containment barge (in fact was) laid up in a drydock in Cordova, locked under ice, 12 hours away." Instead of containing the spill, 1,200 miles of shoreline were wrecked, contaminated enough to remain so for decades at minimum.

For a company with the worst safety and environmental record in the industry "here we go again. Valdez goes Cajun" with contagion enough to contaminate vast parts of the Gulf, Florida Keys, fragile ecosystems, and the entire US East coast and beyond.

This goes way beyond BP and its decades of criminal negligence. It's a regulatory problem for lack of it; a government one for no oversight, public or environmental concern; and a long-term systemic one giving business free reign to plunder and pollute without limit, then when caught call it an accident, paper it over, and repeat again because complicit government officials allow it.