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## GULF OIL SPILL

# Report: Controversial NOAA Oil Spill Estimates Accurate

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Laura Parker  
Contributor

(Nov. 23) -- Last summer's much-derided federal estimates of how much oil from BP's disaster remained in the Gulf of Mexico have proved mostly accurate, according to a peer review of the numbers released today by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"The bottom line is, even under the intense pressures ... the team did a remarkable job of providing pretty accurate calculations," NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco said in a telephone conference call.

The [original report](#), released Aug. 4, featured a pie chart showing that just 26 percent of the oil remained as "residual," either on or just below the surface as light sheen, as weathered tar balls, or washed ashore and embedded in sand.

On the pie chart, the remaining 74 percent of the oil was categorized as having been recovered at the wellhead, burned, skimmed, dispersed, evaporated or dissolved.

That chart, together with statements on television by White House energy adviser Carol Browner that "the vast majority of the oil was gone," drew immediate criticism from independent scientists. They said that the Obama administration had painted too rosy a picture of the aftermath of the spill. Nearly 5 million barrels of oil spewed into the gulf between April 20, when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded and sank, and July 14, when the runaway well was finally capped.

At the time, [Ian MacDonald](#), a Florida State University oceanographer, said that so much oil had escaped into the gulf that some of it would remain in some form for the rest of his life.

[Today's report](#) adjusts some of the statistics in the pie chart. But the report does not deal with the amount of oil that remains in the gulf, or its impact.

[Todd Anderson](#), an environmental toxicologist at Texas Tech University at Lubbock, said NOAA's refined data reflects standard scientific procedure.

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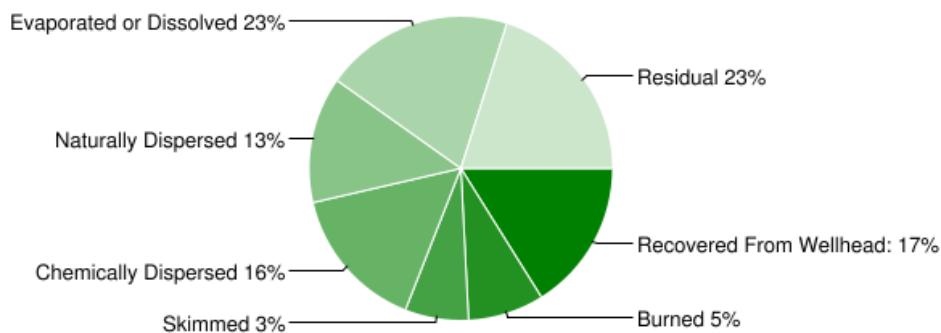
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## OIL SPILL COUNTER

## The Oil From the BP Spill Was:



"I don't know that there's anything more to read into it other than our ability to estimate things improves as we get more data," he said. "But one of the key questions is, how much oil is unaccounted for and what impact will it have? That's what most people are interested in, and that's not going to get answered for a while."

Lubchenco said that those answers will begin to be known once NOAA completes a comprehensive study now under way. So far, the agency has sponsored 125 sea voyages to collect 31,000 samples from the Texas coast to the Florida Keys and 300 miles out to sea. She did not offer an estimate of when that would be complete.

"Over 25 different deepwater vessels have spent 850 days at sea," she said. "Analyzing all those samples does take time."

Lubchenco was cautious today to avoid the generalizations that got the administration in so much trouble three months ago.

She said the "sole purpose" of the August report, formally titled the "Deepwater Horizon Oil Budget," was for use as a tool to help the government organize its response to the disaster. "It did what it was supposed to do," she said.

The government wanted to know "where the oil went," she said. But she cautioned that the report "does not tell us where the oil is today or what its final fate will be or its impact."

Some scientists had scoffed at NOAA's pie chart with its precise calculations. Lubchenco pointed out today that the numbers are much more fluid. For example, the estimate of the "residual" oil that remains has been adjusted downward from 26 percent to 23 percent.

"But this is not a super-precise number," she said. "I note the ranges are from 11 percent to 30 percent."

The biggest change in the new report involves the use of chemical dispersants that broke the oil up into small droplets. NOAA doubled its estimate of the amount of oil that has been chemically dispersed, from 8 percent to 16 percent. It also reduced the amount of oil that had been naturally dispersed from 16 percent to 13 percent.

Lubchenco said that water samples already tested have shown "a significant amount of biodegradation" of the oil that remains.

"The indications that we have from many of the research expeditions are suggesting that the

**NOV** EST. GALLONS LEAKED

**24** **190,120,055**

ADJUST LEAK RATE →

2,604,000

OIL FLOW HALTED ON JUL 15 AT 3:25 PM

CURRENT LEAK ESTIMATES (UPDATED AUG 2)

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY	1,470,000
GAL/DAY	
BP (WORST CASE)	2,520,000 GAL/DAY
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