

6/8/10

Tech professors return from the Gulf to test oil spill samples

Posted: Jun 08, 2010 4:44 PM CDT

Updated: Jun 08, 2010 11:03 PM CDT

By Katie Bauer - [bio](#) | [email](#)

Posted by Amber Stegall - [email](#)

LUBBOCK, TX (KCBD) - A group of Texas Tech professors are back in the Hub City after collecting samples of spilled oil in the Gulf of Mexico.

For nearly two months, this oil spill has continued and while the recently installed cap is helping some, the well continues to leak. That's why researchers from Lubbock went to the Gulf to try to get some important questions answered.

When the offshore oil rig near the Louisiana coast exploded, no one could predict 50 days later the leak would still be going strong. "We don't really know the extent of damage that this particular crude oil will have on ecosystems, wildlife, and on human health," said Texas Tech Associate Professor Dr. Phil Smith.

So that answer is what a small team of Texas Tech associate professors from the Institute of Environmental and Human Health went down to the coast to find out.

"We have traveled 3,380 miles to get these samples, so in that process should we have a problem to where the hurricane season brings it back towards Texas, we would have had a jump start on addressing the problem that we encounter," said Texas Tech Associate Professor Dr. Ernest Smith.

For ten days this group collected several different oil samples to bring back to Texas Tech to test. While they traveled by boat- off of coasts of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the spots weren't hard to find.

"It's really a strange experience to go out on the coast and to see the water change in consistency and then to see these blobs of what we assume to be crude oil floating in the gulf," said Dr. Phil Smith.

But the surfaced oil is not this group's main concern. "I think it's important that we understand that it's not just what we see. There is a lot of oil suspended underneath the surface, and it's sort of out of sight, out of mind, but that's the oil we need to be very concerned about."

The oil collected will now be tested to find out the complete chemical make-up, and the dangers they may carry. One sample has the consistency of thick peanut butter, and the group says it was very difficult to get the oil off their skin after they touched it.

But what's the ultimate fear of what could happen if this doesn't get stopped? "That's the question that I think the institute of environmental and human health is positioning themselves to really ask, nobody knows. We have never seen crude from the earth's crust," said Dr. Ernest Smith.

Dr. Phil Smith says he was shocked by the lack of effort along the coast, and says there will have to be more to get this disaster fixed. "We saw no other boats, we saw no cleanup crews, and we saw no one involved in stopping this in reaching the beaches of Florida and Alabama that concerns me."

This recent trip is the groups third down to the gulf since the spill, and they are already planning another one.

Copyright 2010 KCBD. All rights reserved.



All content © Copyright 2000 - 2010 WorldNow and KCBD, a [Raycom Media Station](#). All Rights Reserved. For more information on this site, please read our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#).