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Congress summons Tech ecologist to oil spill hearing

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By Matthew McGowan

A Texas Tech wildlife toxicologist is scheduled to appear before a congressional panel Thursday to discuss the environmental consequences of the dispersants used in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

Ron Kendall, director of Tech's Institute of Environmental & Human Health, has questioned the chemicals' true effects on sealife. He said he will ask members of the U.S. Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works to approach the use of the chemicals with caution.

"When you look at the threatened endangered species in the Gulf .. all of these organisms and their life cycles can be very sensitive to dispersed oil," Kendall said.

Crews have pumped millions of gallons of the chemical into the Gulf since the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig exploded in April, but some scientists, like Kendall, have wondered if the chemical is making things worse.

Kendall and his teams at the institute have scrambled to test not only the chemical, but also its toxicity once it bonds to small beads of oil.

"The key to all of this is the oil dispersant mixtures," Kendall said. " There's a lot of concern as to the release of the toxic constituents of the oils and where they might be going in the water column."

In late June, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the use the most widely used dispersant, COREXIT, after conducting preliminary tests.

But the agency has scheduled another press conference this afternoon to discuss its findings in a second round of tests, this time into the combination of COREXIT and crude oil.

Check back with Lubbockonline.com or read tomorrow's A-J for more on this story.

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