



FIND A STATION

SEARCH



- [home](#)
- [news](#)
- [arts & life](#)
- [music](#)
- [programs ▾](#)

- [listen ▾](#)
- [HOURLY NEWS](#)
- [PODCASTS](#)

News > Science > Environment

[E-mail](#) [Share](#) [Comments \(11\)](#) [Recommend \(4\)](#) [Print](#)

< **Lasting Impact Of Dispersants Unclear, Senate Told**

Transcript

Copyright ©2010 National Public Radio®. For personal, noncommercial use only. See Terms of Use. For other uses, prior permission required.

Heard on *All Things Considered*

text size [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

August 4, 2010 - MELISSA BLOCK, host:

From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. I'm Melissa Block.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

And I'm Michele Norris.

The chemical dispersants that BP poured into the Gulf of Mexico to dilute the oil from its broken well seem to have disappeared. That's what government scientists told a Senate panel today. But many warned that out of sight should not lead to out of mind. As NPR's Christopher Joyce reports, the long-term effects of these chemicals remain a mystery.

CHRISTOPHER JOYCE: BP and the federal cleanup teams in the Gulf had a choice in the early days of the spill: let the oil rise to the surface, form a slick and travel wherever, or use dispersants to break it up. They chose dispersants - almost two million gallons of them. Republican Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming said the circumstances were unforgiving.

Senator JOHN BARRASSO (Republican, Wyoming): They leave responders with a catch-22: either you are blamed for dumping chemicals in the Gulf or you allow the oil to devastate the Gulf.

JOYCE: Barrasso spoke at a hearing before a panel of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which is weighing new legislation to regulate the use of chemical dispersants. Those dispersants - BP used two kinds of a chemical called Corexit - are toxic. Government scientists say cleanup workers were warned and took safety precautions. As for wildlife exposed to it? Well, nobody really knows.

Dr. PAUL ANASTAS (Assistant Administrator, Office of Research and Development, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency): But what we do know right now is this: We aren't seeing dispersants in our monitoring results.

JOYCE: That's Paul Anastas, a scientist with the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA has looked in deep water, as well as along the Gulf coastline - no dispersants showed up.

But scientists who study marine life point out that doesn't mean the chemicals haven't affected life in the Gulf. Among those scientists is toxicologist Ronald Kendall at Texas Tech University, who implored the senators not to think that the worst is over.

Dr. RONALD KENDALL (Chairman, Department of Environmental Toxicology, Texas Tech University): This is uncharted territory. We need science now.

JOYCE: Kendall said what's happening in the Gulf right now is a huge uncontrolled experiment.



gulf oil spill: complete coverage

- Consumers Not Buying Seafood's Clean Bill Of Health
- Well Plugged, Washington Breathes Sigh Of Relief
- Gulf Residents Not Sure Leak's Worst Is Over

AUG 05 EST. GALLONS LEAKED **190,120,055**

ADJUST LEAK RATE →

OIL FLOW HALTED ON JUL 15 AT 3:25 PM

CURRENT LEAK ESTIMATES (UPDATED AUG 2)

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY	1,470,000
BP (WORST CASE)	2,520,000 GAL/DAY
EXPERTS' WORST CASE	4,200,000 GAL/DAY

GULF LEAK METER

[MORE INFORMATION](#) | [GET THIS WIDGET](#) | [SHARE](#)

Climate Change Archive

Map: Carbon Emissions Giants

Who are the biggest carbon polluters today? Who will it be in 2030?

Idea Rich, Cash Poor

The U.S. has all the tools it needs to replace its old coal system -- except money.

Dr. KENDALL: Did we really understand the environmental toxicology of such a massive use in the deep water of a substance such as Corexit? And I say we did not.

JOYCE: Tests by EPA done since the oil spill show the Corexit dispersant is slightly less toxic than the oil itself. And when it mixes with the oil, the combination is no more toxic than oil by itself. And by now, the Corexit is highly diluted in a vast body of water.

But toxic is a hard thing to pin down. Tests done before and after the spill looked at short-term effects of dispersants on only a few species of fish and shrimp. Many of those tests were done by the manufacturer, not by government regulators. EPA's Anastas acknowledged that science's work is just beginning.

Dr. ANASTAS: I am not suggesting that we have perfect knowledge. I am not suggesting that we don't need more information and more monitoring. I am actually saying straight out that it is important to keep on asking these hard questions.

JOYCE: A lot of marine scientists are asking those questions and wondering where the money will come from to answer them, especially once the drama in the Gulf goes the way of the oil slicks.

Dana Wetzel is a chemist who spent years studying dispersants at the Mote Marine Laboratory in Florida.

Dr. DANA WETZEL (Program Manager, Mote Marine Laboratory): We cannot just sweep this under the rug and say, okay, we're collecting all the oil, and it's going away. We really don't have all that much to worry about any more. I contend that that's absolutely so wrong.

JOYCE: A lot of oil was not collected or burned off and could remain under the Gulf in great clouds of oil and dispersant. Wetzel says the potential long-term effects of this chemical cocktail on everything from coral reefs to whale sharks are unknown.

Dr. WETZEL: Will they reproduce as they normally would? Will they have the same number of offspring? It doesn't end there. Will those offspring reproduce? You know, is their immune system compromised?

JOYCE: The government and BP are hiring scientists to figure these things out, but because their findings may figure in lawsuits against BP, not all the results may be made public.

Christopher Joyce, NPR News.

Copyright © 2010 National Public Radio®. All rights reserved. No quotes from the materials contained herein may be used in any media without attribution to National Public Radio. This transcript is provided for personal, noncommercial use only, pursuant to our Terms of Use. Any other use requires NPR's prior permission. Visit our permissions page for further information.

NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by a contractor for NPR, and accuracy and availability may vary. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Please be aware that the authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio.

E-mail Share Comments (11) Recommend (4) Print

More Environment >



shots - health news blog

Consumers Still Skittish About Gulf Seafood

Oysters top the list of primary concern, mostly because they can't swim away from contaminants.

business

Consumers Not Buying Seafood's Clean Bill Of Health

Areas of the Gulf may resume commercial fishing, but consumers are leering about eating the catch.

environment

Well Plugged, Washington Breathes Sigh Of Relief

PODCAST + RSS FEEDS

Podcast RSS

Environment



Gulf Oil Spill: Complete Coverage



SCIENCE HEADLINES NEWSLETTER

Science headlines delivered weekly. View Sample



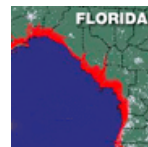
Traveling The Amazon Road

A transcontinental highway brings potential economic prosperity -- and environmental ruin.



Global Warming? It's All About Carbon

An animated Robert Krulwich chemistry lesson -- in five episodes.



Rising Temperatures, Disappearing Coastlines

See what climate change could do to a coastline near you.



Interactive: A Global Climate Journey

Explore a global warming issue and see what NPR has reported from around the world.

donate

Give now

Support the NPR programming you love with a tax-deductible gift today.

shop

Visit the NPR Shop



WEATHER OR NOT, BE READY

FR800 Weather Tracker Radio

Available Now >

BP plans to start pumping cement down the well while it continues work on relief wells.

[sign up](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

comments

Please note that all comments must adhere to the NPR.org discussion rules and terms of use. See also the Community FAQ.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) / [Register](#)



Post this comment to Facebook, too?

[submit](#)

NPR reserves the right to read on the air and/or publish on its Web site or in any medium now known or unknown the e-mails and letters that we receive. We may edit them for clarity or brevity and identify authors by name and location. For additional information, please consult our Terms of Use.

Recent First



S U. (sundog) wrote:

Heck if conservatives are so sure that *nothings wrong, then I encourage them to go out and buy all the Gulf Seafood they can eat and store. It will be helping out Gulf Fishermen and shrimpers, and they will be getting a great deal. And its an excellent way to gloat at all us, liberal fradycats who wouldn't put that stuff in our mouthes even for obscene amounts of money.

Thursday, August 05, 2010 10:10:56 AM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



.x. Science (StarDusted) wrote:

m fellion

Your right, how could millions of barrels of toxic oil being dispersed in the gulf have any negative effect? Funny to hear someone who obviously has 0 scientific understanding call someone else a junk scientist. What are your qualifications intelligent design advocate? AGW denier?

Something does stink...the rot of conservative american brains.

Thursday, August 05, 2010 8:46:31 AM

[Recommend \(5\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



m fellion (michael1) wrote:

Isn't that plane a DC3. I did not know many were still flying around. These junk scientists need an issue to keep the money flowing so they will not be unemployed like a lot of Americans so they keep telling the same lies and half truths. The gulf was not in danger of being destroyed is recovering nicely and from these folks you would not know it. Something stinks and it is not oil.

Thursday, August 05, 2010 2:39:27 AM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



Coyote Farmer (CoyoteFarmer) wrote:

British Petroleum/Halliburton/Transocean are responsible for 11 Workers killed and ALL of the cleanup costs and damages for this Out-of-Control mess.

Thursday, August 05, 2010 12:27:25 AM

[Recommend \(2\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)

Robert Tussey (tusseyrober) wrote:

Shut up get out of DC, get down to the Gulf and find the out the truth. What we do know is oil



is toxic. So in the big picture is using this stuff making things worse. Is it making things better. How long would the oil take to disperse without the use of it, would this cause more or less damage.

Stop talking to people only seeking to make political gains and go find the truth, Whoops that won't happen, science follows the grant money not the science.

Wednesday, August 04, 2010 11:19:30 PM

[Recommend \(2\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



S U. (sundog) wrote:

Since BP has meddled with our ability to do effective internet research I will share some interesting sites: Check out <http://blog.al.com/> ; <http://www.independent.co.uk/> ; <http://www.meriresearch.org/NEWS/CrisisintheGulfofMexico/tabid/249/Default.aspx> ; <http://www.mcclatchydc.com> ; Check this story out in particular: http://www.wkrq.com/gulf_oil_spill/article/orange-beach-tests-their-own-water-soil-air/909281/Jul-29-2010_7-11-pm/ ; <http://www.newsnow.co.uk/h/Hot+Topics/Gulf+of+Mexico+Oil+Spill> ; http://www.travelyucatan.com/cancun_travel_news.php ; This certainly isn't an exhaustive collection of links, but its a start. So far I have found people affected by this of every political stripe. The anger is growing on both sides.

Wednesday, August 04, 2010 11:16:00 PM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



S U. (sundog) wrote:

J. Waterbury, I don't act surprised by the idea that they may withhold that data. They have been withholding lots of other data. They still have not come clean about *ALL the ingredients of the Corexit according to Dr Shaw of MERI. She is marine toxicologist and if you get a chance to see her work, you should. <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/925> I don't buy any of the koolaid being sold right now. Primarily because there has been an egregious lack of transparency by our own government while they are simultaneously in lockstep and even deferring to BP. And now that BP has the same rights to give unlimited campaign contributions as any regular person, well I am even more suspicious. BP has created their own PR nightmare and yet they seem not to care because they are so filthy rich and well connected, that they can all pp in our post toasties with out worrying about having to give so much as a by your leave. There are class actions suits against BP and NALCO right now over Dispersant use. Wright v. BP and Parker v. NALCO. By residents who became ill in their own homes on the shore as well as by shrimpers out to sea. Its a mess and its only going to get worse for the *Small People.

Wednesday, August 04, 2010 11:01:38 PM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



P B (PB2) wrote:

Anyone know if there are increased efforts to cut fertilizer use in the farm belt. Given that it fertilizer cost money, the run off is waste, money poorly spent. Knowing a few Northeastern farmer who are very tight with their money, I assume that products and strategies that help reduce fertilizer runoff (gps control of spreading, timing vs. rain and tilling, others ideas) will be welcomed.

I think there has been some success reducing farm runoff into the Chesapeake Bay. Can lessons learn on the Chesapeake be applied to the Gulf? Obviously the Mississippi and Gulf are bigger, but so is are the risks and the benefits.

Wednesday, August 04, 2010 9:30:32 PM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



Jonathan Waterbury (nonej) wrote:

Mark- I suspect that nobody, including BP, the US government, and everyone else in the world, wanted to SEE the oil on the surface of the Gulf of Mexico.

The larger point going on is, of course, how the dispersants have suspended a huge amount of oil beneath the surface, in the "water column".

Beyond that, thinking about the general health of the Gulf one necessarily gets back to the yearly flow of fertilizer residue which Midwest farmers, mostly growing corn allow to flow into the Mississippi river, then ending up in the Gulf, depleting the waters of huge amounts of oxygen.

If the Gulf of Mexico survives in any configuration similar to what it once was within the next

50 years, I will be celebrating. I don't expect to be celebrating.

Wednesday, August 04, 2010 7:25:36 PM

[Recommend \(2\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)



Mark Fortner (phidias51) wrote:

What I don't understand is why dispersants were used to begin with. If you want to collect all the oil, why make it more difficult by spreading it around?

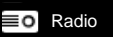
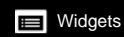
Wednesday, August 04, 2010 7:12:13 PM

[Recommend \(4\)](#) ↑

[Report abuse](#)

[View all comments \(11\)](#)»

npr always on



news

- U.S.
- World
- Opinion
- Politics
- Business
- Technology
- Science
- Health
- Sports

arts & life

- Books
- Movies
- Pop Culture
- Food
- Performing Arts
- Games & Humor

music

- Concerts
- You Must Hear This
- Interviews & Profiles
- Music News
- Music Blogs
- Rock/Pop/Folk
- Jazz & Blues
- Classical
- Browse Artists A-Z
- All Songs Considered
- From The Top
- JazzSet
- Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz
- Mountain Stage
- Song of the Day
- The Thistle & Shamrock
- World Cafe
- World Of Opera

programs a-z

- Morning Edition
- All Things Considered
- Fresh Air
- The Diane Rehm Show
- On The Media
- On Point
- Talk of the Nation
- Tell Me More
- Weekend Edition Saturday
- Weekend Edition Sunday
- Car Talk
- Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!

listen

- Hourly News
- NPR Program Stream
- Schedule
- Find Station Streams

more

- Multimedia
- Columns
- Blogs
- Analysis
- Commentary
- NPR Ombudsman
- Topic Index
- Sponsor NPR
- NPR Shop
- About NPR
- Jobs & Training
- Press Releases