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Effects from gulf oil spill far from over, experts say

By **Craig Pittman**, Times staff writer
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Environment:
Water

Effects from gulf oil spill far from over, experts say

The drilling rig being used for the primary relief well, foreground, and the Helix Q4000 platform used for the static kill operation are shown at the spill site.?



[Associated Press]

The federal government — which has had to repeatedly revise its estimate about how much oil has gushed into the gulf from the Deepwater Horizon disaster — announced Wednesday that "the vast majority" of the oil appears to be gone.

Most of the estimated 4.9 million barrels of oil that spewed out of the collapsed well has "either evaporated or been burned, skimmed, recovered from the wellhead or dispersed," according to a report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Interior Department.

Independent scientists scoffed at the report's findings. Several pointed out that the report estimates that a quarter of the oil is still floating in the gulf or contaminating beaches and marshes, while another quarter was dispersed, either with chemicals or naturally.

In other words, half of it, or about 2.5 million barrels, is still unrecovered.

"I don't think that's real good news,"

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said James "Rip" Kirby, a University of South Florida coastal geologist who has been studying the spill's effects on Panhandle beaches. "That to me is like saying, 'Yee-haw, the Chicago Cubs are only 10 games out of first place!'"

Rick Steiner, a retired University of Alaska professor who worked on the Exxon Valdez disaster, questioned the validity of the estimates in the report, explaining, "These are just what we call WAGs — wild- a-- guesses."

Even if the report's numbers were dead-on, Steiner said, that would not mean the oil spill disaster is over, as some pundits are claiming. The impact is likely to linger for a decade or more.

For instance, in the Exxon Valdez spill, four years passed before the herring population in Prince William Sound collapsed. The toxic contamination had apparently hurt the herrings' immune system.

"The coast is not clear," agreed Ron Kendall, director of the Institute of Environmental and Human Health at Texas Tech University. "Even if all the oil was gone tomorrow, the potential ecological consequences will be unfolding for days, weeks and years to come."

The effects on sea turtles, for instance, likely won't be known for seven years, because that's how long it will take before this year's hatchlings return to the gulf coast to lay their own eggs, he said.

Last month, scientists reported that they found near the spill site a massive die-off of pyrosomes — cucumber-shaped, gelatinous organisms that are a food source for endangered sea turtles. One scientist called it "just a mass eradication" of the creatures.

Meanwhile, droplets of oil turned up inside the shells of young crabs that are a mainstay in the diet of fish, turtles and shorebirds. The orange spots were detected in crabs across the northern Gulf Coast, from southwestern Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle.

Harriet Perry of the University of Southern Mississippi said that in 42 years of studying crabs, she'd never seen anything like it. The crabs are a key species for the whole food chain, she said. "If we have a loss of blue crabs, we're looking at a loss of everything."

When NOAA administrator Jane Lubchenco unveiled Wednesday's report for reporters, she said, "Less oil on the surface does not mean that there isn't oil still in the water column or that our beaches and marshes aren't still at risk."

Scientists from USF and other academic institutions have found vast undersea plumes of dissolved oil droplets miles away from the Deepwater Horizon rig, a sign that the thousands of gallons of chemical dispersants sprayed at the wellhead spread the oil but did not get rid of it.

Kendall pointed out that the report is based on the latest estimate of how much oil has gushed out since the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded April 20. The initial estimate of 5,000 barrels a day has been repeatedly revised.

This week the experts said the well initially spewed out 62,000 barrels a day but the rate declined to 53,000 barrels a day by the time it was capped July 15, for a total of about 4.9 million barrels since the spill began.

Some of the numbers in the report released Wednesday suggest that the massive, expensive joint effort by BP and the government to clean up the spill paid poor dividends: 5 percent of the oil was burned, and a mere 3 percent was skimmed off the surface.

A quarter of it, the report said, simply evaporated.

News reports about the government estimates elated some pundits who had been skeptical about the spill's impact all along.

"The fact is, they can't find the oil," Rush Limbaugh told his radio listeners Wednesday. "This is hilarious. ... Nature always cleans itself up eventually."

Limbaugh referred to reporters covering the oil spill as "dunces" who had been snookered by "environmentalist wackos" into writing stories depicting the disaster as a dire emergency.

Information from the Associated Press was used in this report.

[Last modified: Aug 04, 2010 11:28 PM]

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Surrealist wrote:

It Never Happened. What Oil Gusher? You think there was an Oil Gusher that spewed well over 200 Million Gallons of very toxic crude oil into a fragile, sacred environment ? You must be insane!! You actually believe that leftist, Progressive horse manuer?
There was no Corporate terrorism....
There was no eternal crime commuted against our mother Earth....
I'll have the Fresh Catch said the Tony....

Aug 4, 2010 7:58 PM



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Surrealist wrote:

Corporate Green Washing.
Do the keyword Search.
Culture Jamming.
Ditto.

Aug 4, 2010 8:07 PM



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Surrealist wrote:

Bp
Swine
Bacon

Aug 4, 2010 8:08 PM



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Surrealist wrote:

Pork Choos

Aug 4, 2010 8:09 PM



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Synde75 wrote:

NOTICE HOW THE PRICE OF GAS HAS GONE UP SINCE THEY CAPPED THE LEAK. THE PRICE ACTUALLY WENT DOWN DURING THE SPILL AND MORATORIUM THIS SUMMER. THE PRICE OF OIL WENT UP THE PAST 3 SUMMERS. = ALL ENERGY PRICES ARE AND HAVE BEEN RIGGED!

Aug 5, 2010 12:34 AM



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kameronjo wrote:

yeah that is true, major brands do give out free samples of their popular health products best place to get yours is <http://bit.ly/bf1xD8> tell your friends and family too

Aug 5, 2010 3:13 AM



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isleofjava wrote:

There's no way the damage from the "spill" is over. It'll be going on for years.

As for gas prices:

Monday - gas station gets shipment of gasoline - pays \$1 a gallon (I know that's not accurate)

Tuesday - gas station has a slow day and sells 5% of its supply at \$1.49 a gallon (not accurate)

Wednesday - gas prices go up 5 cents a gallon. Now costs consumer \$1.54 a

gallon.

Why? Why does the consumer pay more per gallon for gasoline the station has already paid for? In my opinion, they shouldn't be able to charge more until they've used the "x" number of gallons they got in the last shipment.

I suppose it's no different than other stores marking up their merchandise, though. It just FEELS worse.

Same gas for which they paid the same price.

Aug 5, 2010 7:23 AM

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unit472 wrote:

Kinda funny how those who dispute the veracity of NOAA's estimates for how much oil is left, don't dispute the government estimate of how much there was...since the government increased its number to almost 5 million barrels.

Aug 5, 2010 7:34 AM

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mediamaker wrote:

Can someone tell me the ticker name of the dispersant company's stock? I want to go buy some.

Aug 5, 2010 8:18 AM

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Thinkaboutit wrote:

This spill will be with us for well over ten years and where will BP be? Drilling in other areas and claim they got all their spill collected so that stuff you see is someone else's. Sure is odd how all these pipes are breaking and oil spilling into the water. Perhaps one should wake up and no more drilling in the water. I don't care for dead birds and fish nor do I like black sand. Hey kids, lets go to the beach and make tar ball castles with oil moats.

Aug 5, 2010 8:33 AM

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Little Lill wrote:

Rush Limbaugh needs to be sued for slander. He lies on a regular basis and get away with it. No one calls him on anything he says. Why???

Aug 5, 2010 9:57 AM

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LiB wrote:

Bull! how can they say the oil just "dissipated" as if it never happened?!? im no scientist but that cannot possibly be true! if the oil "evaporates" it means it is in the air and def in the waters. bring out the gas masks people and look out for two headed turtles and other sea creatures.

Aug 5, 2010 10:17 AM

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crescentbeachbadger wrote:

hey rushie,
why don't YOU go on a gulf seafood diet for a year then?
bet that all yer lard-a** body will just melt away!

Aug 5, 2010 10:26 AM

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billoforlano wrote:

My wife & I spent July 18 to July 25 at a Gulf of Mexico beachfront condo on Perdido Key, FL - about 20 miles west of Pensacola. We had sunny days, large surf due to Tropical Storm Bonnie, miles of dazzling sugar-white sand and not even the slightest hint of any oil! A contingent of BP workers would show up each morning and all they did was pick up any trash and clean up seaweed that washed ashore from Bonnie's water churning. We have been going there every year in July for years. The only difference this year was fewer people. A real shame because it is hurting Perdido's businesses.

Aug 5, 2010 12:04 PM

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sidney wrote:

Why don't people stop thinking about suing? Especially those who have not been affected by the spill AT ALL, and those who have been making zip over the last four or five years and all of a sudden, deep pockets comes in and the slutty lawyers and slutty people just want to grab whatever they can. Does this belong in church (no matter who you are, no matter what you have done?) Wow, what garbage.

Aug 5, 2010 12:18 PM



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