

Spill rate far worse than latest estimate, scientist says

Tom Eley
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Scientists continue to raise doubts about a new government estimate of the rate of the BP spill.

Ira Leifer, who serves on the government-sponsored committee of scientists tasked with estimating the size of the spill, said that he believes that BP's latest effort to stem the rate of oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico has likely made the situation far worse than the latest official estimate, which placed the spill at 12,000 to 19,000 barrels per day. That estimate, it has been revealed, was actually the absolute low-end range determined by Leifer and other scientists on the committee, the Flow Rate Technical Group (FRTG). No high-end range has yet been released.

Leifer, an expert on fluid dynamics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, told the *New York Times* that cutting the riser pipe may have worsened the spill many times over. "The well pipe clearly is fluxing way more than it did before," Leifer said. "I don't mean by 20 percent. I mean multiple factors."

If Leifer is correct, then BP's claims that it is syphoning off nearly 15,000 barrels a day—three times the 5,000 barrels-per-day rate put forth for months—would then only represent a fraction of the spill. This would vindicate an early estimate by Stephen Wereley of Purdue University, a highly-respected expert in particle analysis, who estimated a spill rate of about 80,000 barrels daily, before the riser pipe was cut.

The much higher rate would also appear to be supported by the live video feed of the spill site one mile beneath the ocean's surface. This shows a massive billowing cloud of oil and natural gas apparently much larger than earlier footage had indicated.

On Tuesday, Wereley told the Associated Press that the flow rate from the well was significantly higher than what BP and the government are stating.

"BP is claiming they're capturing the majority of the flow, which I think is going to be proven wrong in short order," Wereley said. "Why don't they show the American public the before-and after shots?" He added that BP's claims are "strictly an estimation, and they're portraying it as fact."

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with two scientists who have served on the committee. One of the two, Peter Cornillon, said that he had raised concerns over the public use of the low-end 12,000-19,000 barrel estimate, which he correctly predicted would be seized on by the media.

Another scientist on the FRTG, Alberto Aliseda of the University of Washington, confirmed that the estimate represented the low-end range consensus among scientists. He said that the high-end estimate would be released within days.

The current rate of extraction, 15,000 barrels a day, has exhausted the receiving capacity of the ship collecting the oil on the surface of the ocean. A second system could expand collection by another 5,000 barrels a day.



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