

BP and White House continue cover-up of oil spill

Hiram Lee
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As BP's latest efforts to stem the flow of oil from the leaking well in the Gulf of Mexico continue to face difficulties, there are new details emerging about attempts by BP and the Obama administration to cover up the true size of the disaster.

It has been revealed that the US Department of the Interior intentionally misrepresented the results of a recent survey of the spill by federal scientists in an attempt to minimize the scope of the disaster.

Last week the Interior Department released a statement to the press with a new estimate placing the amount of oil leaking into the Gulf at 12,000 to 19,000 barrels per day. The numbers came from a survey conducted by the National Incident Command's Flow Rate Technical Group, a team consisting of government scientists and representatives from universities across the US. The White House stood by the new estimates and BP executive Robert Dudley appeared on national television to promote them.

In reality, the scientists conducting the survey reported this estimate only reflected the "lower bounds" of their findings, meaning that the numbers represented the *very least* possible amount of oil flowing into the Gulf. The National Incident Command scientists had not yet arrived at an estimate for the "upper bounds" when the Interior Department released its statement and the scientists say the upper estimate could be "significantly larger."

The Interior press release declared the estimate of 12,000 to 19,000 barrels represented "the lower and upper boundaries" of the study, meaning no more than 19,000 barrels of oil were spilling into the Gulf each

day.

The falsification of the flow rate study by the Interior Department is the latest step in a deliberate effort by BP and the Obama administration to conceal the true dimensions of the oil spill. Immediately following the April 20 explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon rig, in which 11 workers lost their lives, BP reported there had been no oil spill at all resulting from the blast. Unable to maintain this assertion, BP then relented and admitted to a spill of 1,000 barrels per day. When this claim became untenable, the next estimate to be promoted was that of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, placing the size of the spill at 5,000 barrels per day. BP maintained this version of events until the end of May.

All estimates produced by BP and the White House have drawn criticism from scientists throughout the country who have conducted their own independent studies of video footage of the leaking well provided by BP, under pressure. Steven Wereley, an engineering professor at Purdue University, estimates the size of the spill could be as large as 84,000 barrels per day. Eugene Chiang, a professor of astrophysics at the University of California, Berkeley, found the size of the spill could be as large as 100,000 barrels per day.

BP has good reason for wanting a cover-up of the true size of the disaster. While the amount BP can be made to pay for environmental and economic damages resulting from the spill is capped at \$75 million, under the Clean Water Act the company can face civil fines of up to \$4,300 for every barrel of oil spilled into the ocean. Were the government to use BP's original estimates of 1,000 barrels spilled per day, the company

would stand to lose \$215 million for the first 50 days of the disaster. Utilizing the more realistic estimates of independent scientists, the oil giant could be fined hundreds of billions of dollars.

BP's latest attempt to halt the flow of oil into the Gulf is itself a graphic exposure of the extent of the spill and its cover-up by BP and the White House. BP has now placed a cap over what remains of a riser pipe connected to the failed blowout preventer. The leaking oil is being siphoned off through another riser pipe connected to BP's Discover Enterprise ship on the surface of the Gulf. Approximately 11,000 barrels were reportedly collected by BP on Sunday. This number itself would expose as a lie all estimates of the spill promoted by BP since day one of the disaster.

Video feeds indicate massive amounts of oil not collected by the new containment system continue to gush into the open water through four vents in the cap currently in use. BP has attempted to close the vents in order to prevent the oil from leaking into the water, but there is currently more oil flowing from the leak than can be safely processed by the containment ship, which is unable to take on more than 15,000 barrels of oil each day. Only one vent has been closed thus far due to fears that the pressure resulting from the overwhelming amount of oil flowing through the system could cause a catastrophic failure.

BP has announced plans to send another ship to assist in siphoning oil from the leaking well. Next month, the oil giant intends to replace the cap currently being used with a system that might better handle the enormous amount of oil that continues to gush from the ocean floor. The spill will most likely not be fully contained until relief wells are put in place, a process that will not be completed until mid-August at the earliest. The cleanup of the oil already spilled into the Gulf will continue for years.



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