

BP considers “static kill” procedure

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BP announced on Tuesday that it is preparing yet another new procedure, the so-called “static kill,” in an attempt to plug the Macondo well at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. The new option, also known as “bullhead kill,” involves pumping heavy drilling mud into the well, which would then force oil back toward the reservoir in the seabed.

The procedure is similar to the earlier “top kill” attempt carried out in May, which many scientists believe may have actually increased damage to the well casing. During that effort, heavy mud was also pumped into the leaking well, but oil gushed from the well with such force it couldn’t be suppressed by the drilling mud. BP officials claim the static kill would work where the top kill failed because of the reduced pressure in the newly capped well.

On Tuesday, BP executive Kent Wells told reporters, “There are some real benefits to moving forward with this.” He added, “Working in tandem, [the relief well and static kill] could have the ability to have the well killed in less time.”

Petroleum geologist Arthur Berman appeared on CNN to present another reason why BP might choose the static kill procedure. He noted potential difficulties with the relief well option, which involves intersecting the well deep below the surface to pump in heavy mud near the base of the well instead of at its top.

Berman said, “I think the reason that they’re considering [the static kill] is because they’ve yet to intercept the well bore. They’re very close, a few feet away with the relief well, as everyone knows. But to actually intersect the seven-inch pipe does involve a bit of technology and accuracy, whereas if they do the static kill through the existing well bore at the top, there’s less uncertainty about their ability to actually get the mud into the pipe.”

The “static kill” option comes after BP unexpectedly announced that it was installing the new cap last week.

Previously, the company, government and media presented the relief wells as the last best option for stopping the leak. When one sure thing backfires, BP simply moves on to the next proposal and the next optimistic statement to be delivered before a press conference. They do so knowing they will face no repercussions from the federal government and no challenging questions from reporters.

In the background to the recent decisions are concerns that the well casing may be leaking oil, which on the one hand might disrupt the relief well option, and on the other hand could be made worse by the new cap. So far, the pressure within the well has not reached levels that scientists and BP had previously stated would indicate that well casing integrity is still in place.

Over the weekend, reports emerged of seeps of gas within three kilometers of the Macondo well, which could indicate that oil and gas is leaking from the well beneath the surface, and gradually making its way through rock layers up to the sea floor. There were also leaks around the cap itself.

On Tuesday, National Incident Commander Thad Allen told reporters that the leaks around the caps were not “consequential” and that the seeps some distance from the well were in fact from other sources. He did not, however, provide any justification for this assertion. He gave BP at least another 24 hours to keep the cap in place.

Robert Bea, an industrial engineer at the University of California, Berkley and a member of the Deepwater Horizon Study Group said, according an article published by the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* on Monday, that “he has little confidence in what’s been said publicly about the seeps. He’s troubled that we’re just now hearing about seeps three kilometers away, because a survey of the seabed conducted before BP drilled its well didn’t indicate anything like that.”

“There was nothing that indicated the presence of

such a seep,” Bea said. “I wonder why we’re just now finding that out?” The *Times-Picayune* added, “BP has yet to release other ROV video that Bea’s study group requested more than a month ago about what may have been shots.”

Bill Gale, an industrial explosion expert who is also a member of the Deepwater Horizon Study Group, told *Times-Picayune* that there were financial reasons for BP to want to keep on the cap despite potential problems. “Gale...said that BP probably wants to cap to remain in place since it eliminates the PR problem of oil billowing through the water on the ROV cameras, and stops oil that eventually will be tallied as the basis for fines,” the newspaper reported.

Removal of the cap would not only mean more oil flowing directly into the sea, it would also allow for the first accurate measure of the flow rate. The *New York Times* reported on Monday, “Until now, the actual flow rate of gushing into the gulf has been based on estimates. With the well tightly capped, any efforts to collect the oil to ships on the surface would provide a better reading of the oil flow. BP’s ultimate liability for damages from the spill will be based in part on that flow.”



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