

As BP winds down cleanup, environmental impact spreads

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In another indication that BP will seize on its reported success in finally stopping the Gulf oil blowout to protect its revenues, new CEO Bob Dudley on Friday said that the company will start to wind down its cleanup operations.

Efforts to completely shut down the Macondo well have not yet been completed, however. On Monday or Tuesday BP plans to launch a “static” kill, a procedure that involves pumping cement and mud beneath the new cap placed over the blown-out well earlier this month. This step would precede the completion of relief wells, long presented as the only definitive means of finally controlling the Macondo, which dumped upwards of 200 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico between April 20 and mid-July.

“You will see the evidence of a pullback because we have boom across the shores all the way from Florida to Louisiana. Those only last for a certain number of tide cycles,” Dudley said in Biloxi, Mississippi. “And where there is no oil on the beaches you probably don’t need people walking up and down in Hazmat suits. So you’ll probably see that kind of a pullback.”

Local press accounts suggest the wind-down is already underway. The *Press-Register* of Mobile, Alabama, reported on Friday that BP “continued to downsize the number of local workers hired to skim oil from the water, scour beaches and perform other cleanup tasks.”

Marcus Little, of Semmes, Alabama, is a cleanup worker who was told by BP that Friday would be his last day. Little told the *Press-Register* that tar balls and “a layer of a cola-colored substance an inch or so below the surface,” are being left behind. “The latter, he said, makes the sand look like ‘vanilla ice cream with chocolate swirls,’” the newspaper reports.

“If you bring a shovel, you’ll see that the top of the

sand is littered with what looks like chocolate chips, but they’re actually tiny tarballs,” Little said. “I clean the beaches, supposedly, and I find it very disturbing.”

Louisiana fishermen Mike Frenette, who is now employed in BP’s “Vessels of Opportunity” cleanup program, said that on Tuesday the spill was the worst he had seen it. Observing the catastrophe, he questioned whether or not the mainstream media lives in a “parallel universe,” according to the *Times-Picayune*.

“There was more oil at South Pass Tuesday than I’ve seen since this whole thing started; it was really discouraging,” Frenette told the New Orleans newspaper. “I don’t know where everyone else is looking, but if they think there’s no more oil out there, they should take a ride with me. I wish this thing was over so I could get back to fishing. But that’s just not the case. We’re a long way from finished with the oil.”

“I followed a line that stretched from South Pass to Southwest Pass probably two to three miles off the shore,” said Don Sutton, another fisherman employed in the cleanup. “And that wasn’t all we saw. There were patches of oil in that chocolate mousse stuff, slicks, and patches of grass with oil on them. The Gulf might look clear, but we’re still seeing oil coming ashore.”

The *Times-Picayune* also reported that mass die-offs of clams and starfish occurred during the week. Hundreds of starfish climbed out of the water onto beaches in Chandeleur Islands, while an unbroken chain several miles long and ten feet wide of dead clams washed ashore on the Louisiana coast between Buras and Empire.

“That first patch was maybe 6 feet by 10 feet, with maybe hundreds of clams, a lot of them wrapped around big old tar balls,” said Ryan Lambert of Cajun Fishing Adventures in Buras. “Wednesday, there were

millions of them. I've been down here 40 years. I've never seen that before."

Scientists have warned that surface observations of a shrinking oil slick tell only a small part of the story of what is happening in the Gulf. There has never been an oil blowout like the Macondo in terms of volume and depth, as well as the heavy use of chemical dispersants at the site of the blowout one mile beneath the ocean's surface. These factors make predictions difficult.

As much as 200 million gallons of oil remain unaccounted for, subtracting the total amount of oil that BP has skimmed, burned, and siphoned. What has become of all this oil is unclear.

A portion has doubtless been attacked by microbes and eliminated. This process, however, depletes oxygen from the water column, a fact that may well explain the mass die-offs of starfish and crabs this week.

Scientists have also explained that the consumption of oil by small organisms, even at microscopic levels, does not fully eliminate toxins from the water. On the contrary, toxicity can become more concentrated as it moves up the food chain, a process known as bioaccumulation.

George Crozier of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab explained this process to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

"You have millions of simple organisms. These are eaten by small crustaceans called copepods," he said. "Then sperm whales eat millions of these copepods, and with them a big dose of toxicity. I'm skipping a few steps. But this is the picture."

Another significant share of the oil has likely settled on the seabed, where it is encountered by other elementary organisms in the Gulf food chain.

A new study carried out by teams of researchers from Gulf Coast universities has found what appears to be a combination of oil deposits and the chemical dispersant Corexit inside the shells of immature blue crabs in "almost all" specimens found in an area stretching from Galveston Bay, in Texas, to Pensacola, Florida.

Using infrared spectrometry, researchers at Tulane University found Corexit in these specimens, the *Huffington Post* reports. "It does appear that there is a Corexit sort of fingerprint in the blob samples that we ran," Erin Gray, a Tulane biologist said Thursday. Similar chemical deposits have been found in other crab larvae.

Scientists worry that oil and Corexit-contaminated

crabs will be consumed by larger organisms, including people.



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