

BP scales down cleanup efforts

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In line with new numbers presented by the National Incident Command in the Gulf of Mexico, claiming the majority of oil from BP's Macondo well has either been contained or destroyed, BP is drawing down cleanup and recovery efforts in the region.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted yesterday (See "Scientists criticize White House minimization of Gulf disaster"), independent scientists have challenged the NIC's claims.

On Friday, there were 31,000 BP workers in the Gulf, compared to 48,000 during the height of recovery operations. In a statement last week, CEO Bob Dudley announced, "It's not too soon for a scaleback," adding, "you probably don't need to see people in hazmat suits on the beach" in areas where there is no oil.

In Louisiana, Plaquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser has spoken out publicly against the premature reduction in cleanup forces. "We know there's a lot of oil out there," he told the press, "It's going to continue to come ashore, and we're going to hold their feet to the fire to make sure they're there until all the oil is gone out of the Gulf of Mexico before we pull all of the assets out of our parish."

Michael Bromwich, the new director of the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management, formerly the Minerals Management Service, said the moratorium on offshore drilling may now end earlier than the proposed date of November 30. In a Washington press briefing earlier this week, Bromwich told the media, "We may be able to cut short the moratorium before November 20 if that's what the facts support."

"I think it is everybody's hope," he added, "that we will feel comfortable enough that the moratorium can be lifted significantly in advance of November 30."

Although the ban has affected less than 1 percent of offshore drilling operations in the Gulf, the oil conglomerates oppose the slightest limitation on their ability to extract enormous profits from the region.

There are roughly 3,600 drilling platforms already in place in the Gulf and hundreds of new leases have been sold to oil companies since the April 20 Deepwater Horizon explosion, at least 10 of them sold to BP.

ChevronTexaco, the second largest oil company in the US after Exxon Mobil, is the largest leaseholder in the Gulf of Mexico. The drilling moratorium has impacted the drilling of five of their wells in the Gulf. In all, as many as 33 rigs belonging to various companies have had operations suspended due to the ban.

The Gulf is considered an extremely lucrative resource for the oil companies with an estimated 30-40 billion barrels of oil and gas to be found in deepwater reserves.

On Friday, BP Chief Operating Officer Doug Suttles, who has managed BP's recovery efforts in the Gulf but has now been recalled by the company, said the oil giant is considering a return to the very site from which it has spilled as much as 300 million gallons of oil into the Gulf in order to drill once again. Suttles said, "There's a lot of oil and gas here. We're going to have to think about what to do with that at some point." It is estimated there is still as much as \$4 billion worth of oil in the reservoir beneath the Macondo well.

Both BP and the Obama administration are doing their best to bring the episode of the Deepwater Horizon disaster to an end and to present the cleanup and recovery efforts as a mission accomplished. For its part, the media will begin to question whether the danger presented by the spill wasn't overrated to begin with and the path will be prepared for the oil industry to rake in billions in profits from the Gulf once again with no substantial changes made to safety practices or industry regulations.



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