

# Gulf slick matches oil from BP spill

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Independent scientists have confirmed that oil spotted on the surface of the Gulf of Mexico last week is a chemical match to oil from BP's Macondo well, the source of last year's horrific oil spill disaster.

Reports of oil visible in the area surrounding the Macondo well, permanently sealed since September of last year, began to emerge on August 19 when members of the Gulf Restoration Network observed patches of oil sheen during a flyover tour of the site.

Following this, on August 24, journalist Ben Raines of Alabama's *Press-Register* reported having seen hundreds of oil patches, roughly 4 to 5 feet across, spread over the surface of the water, all within a mile of the Macondo wellhead. "Most of the oil," Raines wrote, "was located in a patch about 50 yards wide and a quarter of a mile long." Oil rising to the surface was accompanied by a "pronounced and pungent petroleum smell," he added.

Samples of the oil collected by *Press-Register* reporters were sent to Louisiana State University chemists Ed Overton and Scott Miles for testing. "After examining the data, I think it's a dead ringer for the MC252 [Macondo well] oil, as good a match as I've seen," Overton told the *Press-Register*. He added, "My guess is that it is probably coming from the broken riser pipe or sunken [Deepwater Horizon] platform... However, it should be confirmed, just to make sure there is no leak from the plugged well."

Robert Bea, a petroleum engineer at the University of California who has studied the Deepwater Horizon disaster, responded to photographic evidence of the oil and eye-witness reports of the scene by telling the *Press-Register*: "Looks suspicious. The point of surfacing about one mile from the well is about the point that the oil should show up, given the seafloor at 5,000 feet... natural circulation currents would cause the drift." He continued: "A remote operated vehicle (ROV) could be used to 'back track' the oil that is

rising to the surface to determine the source. This should be a first order of business to confirm the source."

Last Thursday, BP and the US Coast Guard sent investigative teams to the Macondo well site. BP deployed remote-operated vehicles to inspect the wellhead some 5,000 feet below the surface and reported no evidence of leaks. BP spokesman Curtis Thomas said investigators also reported no evidence of oil on surface waters, telling the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "We are currently on the scene with a vessel and have no reports of a visible sheen at the site. A second science vessel on site throughout the day also did not see a sheen on the water."

The purported absence of oil on the water's surface during BP's investigation was likely due to a change in conditions at sea. The wind was reportedly blowing at 10 miles per hour during BP's investigation and waves were up to two feet in height. The water had been relatively still during the *Press-Register's* investigation of the site.

Following his own inspection of the area, Chief Petty Officer John Edwards of the US Coast Guard told the *Times-Picayune*: "We responded adequately with both air and surface assets. They came back with negative results, and at this point there's nothing left for us to do except encourage people—if there are boaters out there and they see things—to continue to call the National Response Center."

There is no reason to take the word of BP or the Coast Guard. The experience of the Deepwater Horizon disaster has shown what their assurances are worth.

Immediately following the explosion aboard the Deepwater Horizon oil rig on April 20 of last year, which claimed the lives of 11 workers and began the worst oil spill in history, BP insisted there had been no oil spill at all. That claim was supported by Rear Admiral Mary Landry of the Coast Guard. Any oil seen

in the water, said BP, was simply due to fuel used aboard the rig spilling into the Gulf.

As more and more oil began to surface, BP was forced to admit that a spill had indeed occurred. The company, with the aid of the White House and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, then attempted to conceal the true size of the spill, first declaring that only 1,000 barrels of oil per day were spilling into the Gulf. When this story proved untenable in the face of the escalating disaster, the estimate was revised to 5,000 barrels per day.

These numbers, presented by both BP and the Obama administration, were challenged by the studies of several independent scientists, who estimated the spill rate was much higher, ranging from 50,000 to 70,000 barrels per day. In all, 4.9 million barrels of oil are believed to have been spilled into the Gulf.

From the beginning, BP, with the complicity of the Obama administration, sought to cover up the disaster. For weeks, scientists were prevented from examining photographic evidence from the well, including a live video feed of conditions at the wellhead. The Obama administration left the investigation of the spill, as well as recovery efforts, in the hands of BP, further blocking any hope of independent analysis.

The overriding concern of BP and the White House throughout the disaster was to defend the profit interests of BP and the oil industry as a whole and minimize any financial damages or legal liability to be faced by the company.

Just as in last year's historic catastrophe, the new concerns of independent scientists and calls for further investigation into the oil observed in Gulf waters have again been met with unverifiable assurances from BP and the Coast Guard, both of whom insist no further investigation will be required.



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