

GULF SPILL

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill is an industrial disaster that began on April 20, 2010, in the Gulf of Mexico on the BP-operated Macondo Prospect, considered to be the largest oil spill in U.S. history.

There are huge areas of uncertainty, they say. While past estimates involved examining satellite images of oil slicks on the surface of the ocean, this study took this analysis a step further by coupling that data set with independent samples taken from the water and sediment near the disaster site in September. Research from earlier this year suggested the leak could be as high as 71,000 gallons a day, reports the Times-Picayune. A modeling effort supported by the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative offered evidence that the dispersants injected into the Macondo wellhead may not have helped to lessen the amount of oil reaching the surface after all. In the Deepwater Horizon explosion, a design flaw in its blowout preventer prevented it from working as intended. Many say there is plenty of evidence to act now. Solving the critical environmental problems of global warming, water scarcity, pollution, and biodiversity loss are perhaps the greatest challenges of the 21st century. But in fragile coastline areas in Louisiana and Mississippi, oil killed off the plants that had been holding the wetlands together. In the past year, Joye — as well as other independent scientists — has repeatedly challenged the official version of the oil disaster put forward by the White House and other administration officials. Exceptions for these restrictions were granted on a case-by-case basis dependent on safety issues, operational requirements, weather conditions, and traffic volume. She has a new scientific paper coming out, and a return research voyage to the Gulf this week, with several more follow-up voyages scheduled this summer to areas within range of the BP well. But Feinberg was so upbeat he told reporters the Gulf could see a complete recovery by 2015. If it proves to be oil from the subsurface, then that could indicate the possibility of an indefinite release of oil. We know far more about the dispersants now than we did in 2010. Booms extend 18–48 inches. An investigation commission appointed by Obama would later deliver harsh criticism to officials for gross underestimates of the spill. Part of the difficulty is that no two spills are alike. And for many people who live in the region, the calamity is still not over. By then, four million barrels of crude had seeped into the surrounding water, endangering marine wildlife and throwing local ecosystems out of balance. And for long-lived marine animal populations, the oil spill has been deadly. These slicks can wreak havoc on coastal ecosystems and animals, so cleanup workers use dispersants — chemicals that break down the oil into smaller particles that mix with water more easily — to prevent them from forming. See "Human Health Impacts."