U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up
Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

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Table of Contents

Blog Round-up
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ROUND-UP MAJOR BLOGS 2
BP SPILL 2
Excessive Use of Dispersants? BP Continued Use After Ordered to Scale Back (*Daily KOS*) 2
BP to offer claimants a One-time Payment (*Daily KOS*) 4
CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING 7
George Schultz, Meg Whitman's Campaign Co-Chairman, Clashes With Her On Global Warming (*Huffington Post)* 7
FUEL 8
EPA notes improvements at Michigan oil spill site (*Huffington Post*) 8
Law center threatens suit over Mich. oil spill (*Huffington Post*) 9

ROUND-UP MAJOR BLOGS

BP SPILL

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Excessive Use of Dispersants? BP Continued Use After Ordered to Scale Back (*Daily KOS*)

Just yesterday Congressman Markey is asking if more dispersants were used than BP disclosed to the public. There have been a lot of questions surrounding the use of dispersants, from their level of toxicity and the usefulness to them in a spill of this size.

I wrote about the mix of using booming and dispersants and how people actually questioned doing both at the same time (although there has been a lot of talk as well how booming was bust and not done very well either). But rounding up dispersed oil in booms makes no sense. The whole operation by BP seemed rather, well, highly questionable. The technology for drilling had come a long way, but not the technology for dealing with oil spills and the health of the workers for cleaning them up.

So now that BP is declaring victory, the oil is coming to a halt, and even disappearing there are more questions we need to ask rather than throwing a party.

BP knows the game, it's more about perception than reality, that's why they've spent a lot of money on PR, it's why they've bought up scientists to spin their message and they've put things out there for the media to eat up.

But not everyone along the Gulf coast is ready to celebrate quite yet. Especially in hard-hit Louisiana, there are deep suspicions that BP will look for any excuse to pull out of the region early, to declare victory and go home—even while there's still oil to be cleaned up. Certainly BP is ready to shift its focus. Incoming BP CEO Bob Dudley told reporters on Friday that it was "not too soon for a scaleback" in the cleanup efforts, and that we'd likely see a reduction in the number of hazmat-suited cleanup workers patrolling the beaches. Later a BP spokesperson told the New York Times that "there is going to be a natural transition from a short-term emergency response, skimming and cleaning up beaches, over time to a long-term recovery and restoration organization."

To that end, the company announced on Friday the hiring of James Lee Witt, the former head of

the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) under President Clinton, to help oversee the long-term effort to restore the Gulf. But parish officials in Louisiana have resisted some efforts to redistribute cleanup resources—on Friday afternoon, Plaquemines Parish president Billy Nungesser had his sheriffs pull over trucks that had been taking boom out of his parish. Later that day other parish presidents in Louisiana—who have significant powers, thanks to the state's, uh, peculiar political culture—issued executive orders demanding that no spill response equipment be moved out of their territory. On Saturday morning Nungesser took a group of reporters on a boat trip off the coast, where they saw fresh oil on the marshes and tar balls in the water. The message was clear—the end of the spill had been greatly exaggerated. "Let me take [Dudley] water-skiing out here and see if he comes up black," Nungesser said.

Emphasis mine

This is the overriding theme with BP, much has been "greatly exaggerated" by BP and covered up and blacked out. Greenwashing, whitewashing, you name it, BP has done it. And there still are so many more questions than answers.

So why is Markey asking questions, because this is what is so alarming, the rubberstamping of widespread use of dispersants that has been proven to be toxic and never been used in the amounts it was used with this catastrophic event.

The Coast Guard has routinely approved BP requests to use thousands of gallons of toxic chemical a day to break up oil slicks in the Gulf of Mexico despite a federal directive that the chemicals be used only rarely on surface waters, congressional investigators said Saturday after examining BP and government documents.

The documents show the Coast Guard approved 74 waivers over a 48-day period after the restrictions were imposed, resulting in hundreds of thousands of gallons of the chemicals to be spread on Gulf waters. Only in a small number of cases did the government scale back BP's request.

Source

Emphasis mine

It's a problem when we have no idea how much dispersant was used, these questions must be asked.

Congress is stepping up its scrutiny of chemical dispersants sprayed on the Gulf of Mexico oil spill to prevent crude from washing ashore.

Rep. Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, contends that BP PLC and the Coast Guard have used more of the chemicals than widely reported. On Saturday he demanded that federal officials provide his office with more information about use of the chemicals, which the Environmental Protection Agency limited in late May due to concerns about their effects on marine life.

"BP carpet bombed the ocean with these chemicals, and the Coast Guard allowed them to do it," Rep. Markey said in a statement.

Source

The dispersants weren't just sprayed over the water though, it was sprayed near land, near homes and near the people who live off the coast. This is not just an environmental disaster, this is a disaster that we still cannot grasp.

Everyone wants to believe that it is all but coming to an end. It is not.

Riki Ott has some astounding information about the use of Corexit and it's affects on human beings, the environment and animals. There is exstensive information on the chemicals used and the health hazards posed by those chemicals and the oil itself.

Though all dispersants are potentially dangerous when applied in such volumes, Corexit is particularly toxic. It contains petroleum solvents and a chemical that, when ingested, ruptures red blood cells and causes internal bleeding. It is also bioaccumulative, meaning its concentration intensifies as it moves up the food chain.

New York Times

As I said, it was not just being sprayed over the water, but on the shore!

The long term affects of the oil are going to be devastating but the dispersants are going to be an issue as well and the combined effects?

This is why I've written about Project Gulf Impact and why we must talk about how all of this is touching so many lives (Please go read my diary, I argue why we have to document the struggles of people in the Gulf) along the Gulf and how people's health is being destroyed by these chemicals, their livelihoods gone, their spirits broken and the environment in long term peril.

We must keep this in the public's eye and remind them that the spill is not ending, this is going to be something we must deal with for generations to come. And part of that will have to do with telling the stories of the people who have been hit the hardest, those living in the Gulf.

BP to offer claimants a One-time Payment (*Daily KOS*)

I think "Breaking" is the correct adjacent ...

BP offers one-off payouts to stem Gulf oil spill lawsuits

Lump-sum compensation offered in return for waiving the right to sue,

but uncertainty remains for those indirectly affected

Tim Webb, guardian.co.uk -- August 1, 2010

BP will begin its legal offensive this month to cap its liabilities from the Gulf of Mexico disaster by offering those affected one-off compensation payouts in return for them waiving the right to sue.

The fund does not cap BP's liabilities at $20bn. But privately the company believes that it will not have to pay out anywhere near this sum. BP has hired a battery of lawyers to protect itself, and so far it has paid out $261m in claims.

Hmmm ... Seems BP is a bit worried about the long-term effects of that 1.8 Millions of gallons of Corexit, they used -- to help make that spill problem disappear?

Perhaps they are worried with good reason ... even the maker of Corexit warns it has the potential to BioAccumulate

Bioaccumulation – "Bioaccumulation is defined as the accumulation of chemicals in the tissue of organisms through any route, including respiration, ingestion, or direct contact with contaminated water, sediment, and pore water in the sediment."

-- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2000

In short, Corexit (with all its known and unknown Toxic properties) will likely move up the food chain.

The maker of Corexit, Nalco warns:

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION :

Where concentrations in air may exceed the limits given in this section, the use of a half face filter mask or air supplied breathing apparatus is recommended. A suitable filter material depends on the amount and type of chemicals being handled. Consider the use of filter type: Multi-contaminant cartridge. with a Particulate pre-filter. In event of emergency or planned entry into unknown concentrations a positive pressure, full-facepiece SCBA should be used.

BIOACCUMULATION POTENTIAL

Component substances have a potential to bioconcentrate.

http://lmrk.org/...

Hmmmm .... Face-Masks ... recommended ... should be used in "event of emergency" ???

I wonder if BP ACTUALLY read the instructions, before using the Product? ... before equipping their "temp workers" for their "hazardous duty"?

I wonder if BP knows that Dispersants with the active ingredient of 2-butoxyethanol has a "track record" of causing Human Health problems -- already?

At What Cost? BP Spill Responders Told to Forgo Precautionary Health Measures in Cleanup

HuffingtonPost: May 17, 2010

by Riki Ott, Marine toxicologist and Exxon Valdez survivor, RikiOtt.com

During the 1989 cleanup in Alaska, thousands of workers had what Exxon medical doctors called, "the Valdez Crud," and dismissed as simple colds and flu. [...]

In 1989 Exxon knew cleanup workers were getting sick: Exxon's clinical data shows 6,722 cases of upper respiratory "infections"--or more likely work-related chemical induced illnesses. Exxon also knew workers were being overexposed to oil vapors and oil particles as verified through its air-quality monitoring program contracted to Med-Tox. The cleanup workers never saw results of this program. Neither did OSHA, the agency supposedly charged to oversee and independently monitor Exxon's worker-safety program.

And based on air monitoring conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in a Louisiana coastal community, those workers seem to be correct. The EPA findings show that airborne levels of toxic chemicals like hydrogen sulfide, and volatile organic compounds like benzene, for instance, now far exceed safety standards for human exposure.

The individual stories of Exxon Valdez Cleanup Workers are heart breaking, and not very well known. But they should be included in the brand NEW EPA Toxicity studies -- don't you think?

"I was in the doctor's office continually," Merle Savage says. "She always heard my stomach rolling and one day she said 'Have you eaten anything toxic or had any contaminated water?' I said no, never thinking it was the crude oil." Savage went on to develop a frightening list of symptoms: cirrhosis of the liver (she doesn't drink), rheumatoid arthritis, constant diarrhea, and respiratory problems.

The Gulf Coast economy, and its people, and ecosystems, MAY recover someday -- but "it won't be by the grace of BP" either.

BP has hire a "hired a battery of lawyers to protect itself" from all the pesky claims of those 'local yocals', and the eco-whirlwind they've inherited ...

BP offers one-off payouts to stem Gulf oil spill lawsuits

Tim Webb, guardian.co.uk -- August 1, 2010

But lawyers say it is impossible to calculate future lost earnings. There is also no way for claimants to know whether they would receive more compensation if they decided to sue BP in the courts, which would take many months with no guarantee of success. Brent Coon, a Houston-based lawyer, said: "These are mostly uneducated people."

Applicants could rush to apply for a one-off, lump sum payout if they believe that BP will run out of money or will put its US business into bankruptcy.

When Feineberg takes over this month, for the first time claimants will be offered a one-off sum based on their future lost earnings, provided they agree not to sue BP.

Short-term gain -- in exchange for long-term pain -- What a Deal!

A deal for whom? ... should be the next question.

Where are all the good "class action suit" lawyers, when you need them?

Where is the DOJ?

Where are the "Vessels of Opportunity" for moving us to a Clean Energy future?

Get the eKos widget embed code!

CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING

August 2, 2010

George Schultz, Meg Whitman's Campaign Co-Chairman, Clashes With Her On Global Warming (*Huffington Post)*

First Posted: 08- 2-10 11:40 AM | Updated: 08- 2-10 11:40 AM

Former U.S. secretary of State George P. Shultz believes it's crucial to fight global warming to protect national security.

Global warming is created by burning fossil fuel, he says, and payments for foreign oil sometimes wind up financing terrorism.

And Shultz, who's also a former Treasury secretary, thinks the nation suffers an "economic vulnerability" because of its oil addiction.

"While we have benefited from low-priced energy," he says, "we've also suffered from periodic spikes in the price of oil. Usually recessions go along with it."

Moreover, continues the man who set up the Environmental Protection Agency four decades ago, "There's a climate problem connected with the burning of fossil fuels.... The basic facts are pretty clear."

FUEL

EPA notes improvements at Michigan oil spill site (*Huffington Post*)

LANSING, Mich. — A regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday that significant improvement had been made at the site of an oil spill in a southern Michigan river, but the agency cautioned that it will take months to complete the cleanup.

Those efforts, along with air and water quality monitoring, continue to increase along the affected stretch of the Kalamazoo River, EPA regional administrator Susan Hedman said during a media briefing in Marshall.

The oil flow was stopped and contained in a 25-mile stretch of the river from Marshall westward past Battle Creek. Several hundred workers are on crews along the river devoted to the cleanup.

"Containment is adequate now," said Mark Durno, the EPA's deputy incident commander. "Now it's a matter of recovery and removal of the remainder of the sheen and small patches of oil that remain on the Kalamazoo River."

The EPA estimates it will take weeks to get the oil out of the river and months to clean it off river banks and the flood plain. It could take several months to clean up the marshy area where the spill began near a creek that flows into the Kalamazoo River, the agency said.

Officials with Enbridge Inc., which owns the pipeline, estimated Sunday that the company had recovered slightly more than half the oil that had leaked.

Enbirdge officials said they detected the leak July 26. Investigators are reviewing 911 calls to Marshall area fire departments made the previous evening by residents complaining of a strong gas odor to try and determine if the leak might have begun earlier.

The EPA estimates the spill at more than 1 million gallons of crude, while the Canadian company estimates the total at 820,000 gallons. The leak came from a 30-inch pipeline, which was built in 1969 and carries about 8 million gallons of oil daily from Griffith, Ind., to Sarnia, Ontario.

The cost of the cleanup hasn't been determined. Enbridge is responsible for the cleanup bill, including money that the EPA and other government agencies will spend on its response.

"Our goal is to return the river to the state it was in before this incident," Enbridge CEO Patrick D. Daniel said.

The EPA and other government officials have scheduled a public meeting for residents at Marshall's high school on Monday evening. A similar public hearing will be scheduled for Battle Creek residents later in the week.

The section of the pipeline where the leak occurred could be removed early this week. It's expected to be taken to a National Transportation Safety Board lab for testing to try and determine the cause of the incident.

The EPA on Saturday said it had rejected the Calgary, Alberta-based company's long-range cleanup plan because of "deficiencies in content and technical details." It ordered Enbridge to submit a revised version by Monday. Daniel said the company will modify the plan to meet EPA requirements.

U.S. regulators earlier this year demanded improvements to the pipeline network that includes a segment that ruptured in southern Michigan. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation's regulatory arm, said it had summoned Enbridge Inc. executives in February to discuss problems with the 1,900-mile Lakehead system.

The agency has cited Enbridge or its affiliates for 30 enforcement actions since 2002.

Law center threatens suit over Mich. oil spill (*Huffington Post*)

JOHN FLESHER | August 2, 2010 12:19 PM EST |
TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — A public interest law firm is preparing to sue the Canadian owners of a pipeline that ruptured in southern Michigan and dumped hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil into a Kalamazoo River tributary.

The Great Lakes Law Center on Monday sent Enbridge Inc. a notice of intent to file if a settlement isn't reached within 60 days. The letter accuses the company of violating the Clean Water Act.

The Detroit-based law center says Enbridge could face more than $26 million in civil penalties based on the Environmental Protection Agency's estimate the spill exceeds 1 million gallons. The company estimates it at 820,000 gallons.

Company spokeswoman Lorraine Grymala says she's unaware of the letter and can't comment on litigation.

Enbridge reported the spill a week ago.