

Environmental Devastation: The Gulf Oil Spill Is NOT Old News

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

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While the Japanese nuclear crisis might upstage the Gulf crisis, it hasn't gone away.

As the Wall Street Journal [notes](#) today:

Vladimir Uiba, head of Russia's Federal Medical-Biological Agency... compared the contamination of seawater by the Fukushima complex with an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico by BP PLC last year, and said, "The BP oil spill has caused far more serious impact on the environment than the Fukushima accident"

Whether or not the oil spill is worse than Fukushima or not, it was – and [still is](#) – a major disaster.

Gulf residents are [still getting sick](#), the number of dolphins and whales killed by the spill appears to be [many times higher than officials previously believed](#). Dead turtles are [washing up in Mississippi](#). And see these photos from my favorite photographer, [Julie Dermansky](#):



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And just-released confidential BP and government emails confirm my previous posts showing:

- The government is [keeping scientists away](#) from “ground zero” of the oil spill and – for that reason – scientists cannot accurately measure the size of the oil spill
- When university scientists found underwater oil plumes, [the government said shut up, don't tell anyone ... and then tried to discredit them](#)
- BP and government representatives are [still keeping scientists and reporters](#)

[away from areas impacted by oil](#)

- BP is [controlling university research, and the professor who downplayed the oil spill is being called a “shill” by a fellow professor](#)
- BP and the government famously declared that most of the oil had disappeared, when it [hadn't](#)
- The government did everything in its power to [help cover up the severity of the spill](#)

As the Guardian [reports](#) today:

BP officials tried to take control of a \$500m fund pledged by the oil company for independent research into the consequences of the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster, it has emerged.

Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act [show BP officials openly discussing](#) how to influence the work of scientists supported by the fund, which was created by the oil company in May last year.

Russell Putt, a BP environmental expert, wrote in an email to colleagues on 24 June 2010: “Can we ‘direct’ GRI [Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative] funding to a specific study (as we now see the governor’s offices trying to do)? What influence do we have over the vessels/equipment driving the studies vs the questions?”.

The email was obtained by Greenpeace and shared with the Guardian.

The documents are expected to reinforce fears voiced by scientists that BP has too much leverage over studies into the impact of last year’s oil disaster.

Those concerns go far beyond academic interest into the impact of the spill. BP faces billions in fines and penalties, and possible criminal charges arising from the disaster. Its total liability will depend in part on a final account produced by scientists on how much oil entered the gulf from its blown-out well, and the damage done to marine life and coastal areas in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The oil company disputes the government estimate that 4.1m barrels of oil entered the gulf.

Kert Davies, Greenpeace US research director, said the oil company had crossed a line. “It’s outrageous to see these BP executives discussing how they might manipulate the science programme,” Davies said. “Their motivation last summer is abundantly clear. They wanted control of the science.”

The \$500m fund, which is to be awarded over the next decade, is by far the biggest potential source of support to scientists hoping to establish what happened to the oil.

A number of scientists had earlier expressed concerns that BP would attempt to point scientists to convenient areas of study – or try to suppress research that did not suit its business.

Another email, written by Karen Ragoonanan-Jalim, a BP environmental officer based in Trinidad [says] "Discussions around GRI and whether or not BP can influence this long-term research programme (\$500m) to undertake the studies we believe will be useful in terms of understanding the fate and effects of the oil on the environment, eg can we steer the research in support of restoration ecology?"

And as the Guardian notes, it wasn't just BP which was doing the spinning:

Other documents obtained by Greenpeace suggest that the politics of oil spill science was not confined to BP. The White House clashed with officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last summer when drafting the administration's account of what has happened to the spilled oil.

On 4 August, Jane Lubchenco, the NOAA administrator, demanded that the White House issue a correction after it claimed that the "vast majority" of BP oil was gone from the Gulf.

A few days earlier, Lisa Jackson, the head of the EPA, and her deputy, Bob Perciasepe, had also objected to the White House estimates of the amount of oil dispersed in the gulf. "These calculations are extremely rough estimates yet when they are put into the press, which we want to happen, they will take on a life of their own," Perciasepe wrote.

And because [nothing has really changed](#), it is [likely to happen again](#).

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