

Gulf Oil Spill Crisis Not Over: BP's Deepwater Horizon Well Is Leaking Again

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Leaking Oil Is a “Dead Ringer” For Oil From BP’s Gulf Well

“It’s A Dead Ringer For The [BP] Oil, As Good A Match As I’ve Seen” ... “I Think The Primary Source With High Probability Is Associated With [Last Year’s Damaged BP] Well”

The Press-Register [reports](#) today:

Scientific analysis has confirmed that oil bubbling up above BP’s sealed Deepwater Horizon well in recent days is a chemical match for the hundreds of millions of gallons of oil that spewed into the Gulf last summer.

The Press-Register collected samples of the oil about a mile from the well site on Tuesday and provided them to Ed Overton and Scott Miles, chemists with Louisiana State University.

The pair did much of the chemical work used by federal officials to fingerprint the BP oil, known as MC252.

“After examining the data, I think it’s a dead ringer for the MC252 oil, as good a match as I’ve seen,” Overton wrote in an email to the newspaper. “My guess is that it is probably coming from the broken riser pipe or sunken platform. ... However, it should be confirmed, just to make sure there is no leak from the plugged well.”

MC252 is short for Macondo block 252, which is the official designation for the [location of last year’s BP Gulf oil spill](#).

Overton is a LSU professor and oil spill expert, who has been a lead NOAA consultant for decades, and who analyzing Macondo oil samples last year for the federal government. And see [this](#) and [this](#).

The Leak Is Associated With BP’s Well

The Press-Register [reported](#) yesterday:

Oil is once again fouling the Gulf of Mexico around the Deepwater Horizon well, which was capped a little over a year ago. [Deepwater Horizon is the name of the oil drilling rig drilling at BP’s Macondo well, the one which exploded and sank last year.]

Tuesday afternoon, hundreds of small, circular patches of oily sheen dotted the surface within a mile of the wellhead. With just a bare sheen present over about a quarter-mile, the scene was a far cry from the massive slick that covered the Gulf last summer.

Floating in a boat near the well site, Press-Register reporters watched blobs of oil rise to the surface and bloom into iridescent yellow patches. Those patches quickly expanded into rainbow sheens 4 to 5 feet across.

Each expanding bloom released a pronounced and pungent petroleum smell.

"I think the primary source with high probability is associated with the Macondo well," said Robert Bea, an internationally prominent petroleum engineer and professor emeritus at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. Bea responded to Press-Register questions via email after examining photographs taken by the newspaper.

"Perhaps connections that developed between the well annulus (outside the casing), the reservoir sands about 17,000 feet below the seafloor, and the natural seep fault features" could provide a pathway for oil to move from deep underground to the seafloor, Bea said.

"Looks suspicious. The point of surfacing about 1 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," Bea said.

We May Never Be Able To Fully Stop the BP Leak

Washington's Blog [interviewed](#) Dr. Bea a year ago, and the oil expert noted that we may never be able to fully stop BP's oil leak:

Few people in the world know more about oil drilling disasters than Dr. Robert Bea.

Bea teaches engineering at the University of California Berkeley, and has 55 years of experience in engineering and management of design, construction, maintenance, operation, and decommissioning of engineered systems including offshore platforms, pipelines and floating facilities. Bea has worked for many years in governmental and quasi-governmental roles, and has been a high-level [governmental adviser](#) concerning disasters. He worked for 16 years as a top mechanical engineer and manager for Shell Oil, and has worked with Bechtel and the Army Corps of Engineers. One of the world's top experts in [offshore drilling problems](#), Bea is a [member](#) of the [Deepwater Horizon Study Group](#), and has been interviewed by news media around the world concerning the BP oil disaster.

WB: Is it possible that this fractured, subsea salt geology will make it difficult to permanently kill the oil leak using relief wells?

Bea: Yes, it could. The Santa Barbara channel seeps are still leaking, decades after the oil well was supposedly capped. This well could keep leaking for years.

Scripps mapped out seafloor seeps in the area of the well prior to the blowout. Some of the natural seeps penetrate 10,000 to 15,000 feet beneath the seafloor. The oil will follow lines of weakness in the geology. The leak can travel several horizontal miles from the location of the leak.

[In other words, the geology beneath the seafloor is so fractured, with soft and unstable salt formations, that we may never be able to fully kill the well even with relief wells. Instead, the loss of containment of the oil reservoir caused by the drilling accident could cause oil to leak out through seeps for years to come. See [this](#) and [this](#) for further background].

WB: I have heard that BP is [underestimating](#) the size of the oil reservoir (and see [this](#)). Is it possible that the reservoir is bigger than BP is estimating, and so – if not completely killed – the leak could therefore go on for longer than most assume?

Bea: That's plausible.

WB: The chief electronics technician on the Deepwater Horizon said that the Macondo well was originally drilled in another location, but that "going faster caused the bottom of the well to split open, swallowing tools", and that BP abandoned that well. You've spoken to that technician and looked into the incident, and concluded that "they damn near blew up the rig." [See [this](#) and [this](#)].

Do you know where that abandoned well location is, and do you know if that well is still leaking?

Bea: The abandoned well is very close to the current well location. BP had to file reports showing the location of the abandoned well and the new well [with the Minerals Management Service], so the location of the abandoned well is known.

We don't know if the abandoned well is leaking.

WB: Matthew Simmons [talked](#) about a second leaking well. There are rumors on the Internet that the original well is still leaking. Do you have any information that can either disprove or confirm that allegation?

Bea: There are two uncorroborated reports. One is that there is a leak 400 feet West of the present well's surface location. There is another report that there is a leak several miles to the West.

[Bea does not know whether either report is true at this time, because BP is not sharing information with the government, let alone the public.]

Indeed, in June of 2010, [BP officials admitted to damage beneath the seafloor](#), and numerous scientists have speculated that [the blowout and subsequent clumsy attempts by BP to plug the well could have created new seeps, and made pre-existing natural seeps bigger](#).

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