

How Big Is the Oil Spill?

By [Global Research](#)

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BP initially asserted that 1,000 barrels of oil per day (42,000 gallons) were gushing forth from the broken pipeline. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration soon upped the estimate to 5,000 barrels per day (210,000 gallons). Then experts [stated](#) the gusher is more likely on the order of 25,000 barrels per day (1,050,000 gallons). That would mean the amount spilled already exceeds the 10.8 million gallons spilled by the Exxon Valdez, making it the worst oil spill in American history. On May 4, BP officials reported that the oil spill could grow at 12 times the initial estimate, releasing 2.5 million gallons of oil per day into the Gulf of Mexico. If the wellhead fails completely — which hasn't happened yet — the spill rate could increase to 6.8 million gallons of oil per day.

Oil has landed on several small islands known as the Chandeleur Islands on the Louisiana coast, including areas of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge. Oil covered gannets and brown pelicans have been found and the refuge was closed to the public for safety reasons. The area provides key nesting and migratory stopover habitat for thousands of birds, as well as important fishery habitat. Tar balls have also washed up on Alabama's white sandy beaches of Dauphin Island. Some of the oily foam, a mixture of oil, water, and dispersants, is also washing up near the Mississippi delta. The stench of crude permeates coastal areas, where it's causing headaches, burning eyes, and nausea among the people who live there. Meanwhile, the duration and area covered by the ban on fishing have been extended as the oil continues to seep into the Gulf.

Plugging one of the three leaks in BP's crumpled pipeline has failed to slow the gush of oil, and BP's next-best hope of drilling an adjacent well to relieve the pressure from the damaged well, so it can be capped, is at least 90 days away. BP attempted to contain the spill with a giant steel box placed over the leaks, but in the deep waters a mile below the surface the dome has frozen gas hydrates clogged the funnel. Efforts to solve the problem continue, but the dome has been set aside for a few days. Other fixes in the works include: using a smaller containment box, shooting debris such as tires and golf balls into the well, or cutting the leaking pipe and putting larger pipe like a straw over it. These are all untested and risky solutions and some of them also have the potential to increase the flow of oil. In the meantime, controlled burns of the oil on the surface have belched fire and smoke into the atmosphere.

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