

University Scientists Found Underwater Oil Plumes, the Government Said Shut Up, Don't Tell Anyone and Tried to Discredit them

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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As I've previously reported, a senior EPA policy analyst [says](#) that NOAA and the EPA have been "sock puppets" for BP.

NOAA has repeatedly denied the existence of underwater oil plumes (see [this](#) and [this](#)), [calculated](#) the spill to be only 5,000 barrels a day, and [buried](#) core data on the oil spill.

Now, university scientists have revealed the NOAA used strong-arm tactics to try to silence any information on underwater plumes. As the St. Petersburg Times [reports](#):

The reaction that [the University of South Florida] announcement [of the discovery of huge underwater plumes] received from the Coast Guard and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the federal agencies that sponsored their research:

Shut up.

"I got lambasted by the Coast Guard and NOAA when we said there was undersea oil," USF marine sciences dean William Hogarth said. Some officials even told him to retract USF's public announcement, he said, comparing it to being "beat up" by federal officials.

The USF scientists weren't alone. Vernon Asper, an oceanographer at the University of Southern Mississippi, was part of a similar effort that met with a similar reaction. "We expected that NOAA would be pleased because we found something very, very interesting," Asper said. "NOAA instead responded by trying to discredit us. It was just a shock to us."

NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco, in comments she made to reporters in May, expressed strong skepticism about the existence of undersea oil plumes — as did BP's then-CEO, Tony Hayward.

"She basically called us inept idiots," Asper said. "We took that very personally."

Lubchenco confirmed Monday that her agency told USF and other academic institutions involved in the study of undersea plumes that they should hold off talking so openly about it. "What we asked for, was for people to stop speculating before they had a chance to analyze what they were finding," Lubchenco said. "We think that's in everybody's interest. ... We just wanted to try to make sure that we knew something before we speculated about it."

"We had solid evidence, rock solid," Asper said. "We weren't speculating." If he had to do it over again, he said, he'd do it all exactly the same way, despite Lubchenco's ire.

USF's first NOAA-sponsored voyage to take samples after Deepwater Horizon, the one that turned up evidence of the undersea plumes, was designed to gather evidence for use in an eventual court case against BP and other oil companies involved in the disaster. At the end of the voyage, USF turned its samples over to NOAA, expecting to get either a shared analysis or the samples themselves back. So far, Hogarth said, they've received neither.

NOAA's top oil spill scientist, Steve Murawski, said Monday that he was "sure we will release the data" at some point. However, he said, because NOAA has collected so many samples over the past three months, when it comes to the samples from USF's trip in May, "I'm not sure where they are."

A government official named "Lubchenco" strong-arming scientists to tow the party line, and a government agency "losing" samples instead of sharing results with the scientists who had taken them.

Sounds like the Soviet Union, doesn't it?

Too bad [it's America](#).

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