

Why BP Refuses To Stop Using Chemical Dispersants

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Why does BP refuse to stop using the chemical dispersants the EPA ordered BP to stop using?

According to scientists studying the massive underwater oil plumes, the dispersants keep the oil underwater, away from the naked eye and satellite view. Some of the oil plumes are over 30 foot deep and 26 miles long.

One scientist said about using dispersants on oil: "You don't want to put soap into a fish tank."

This discovery seems to confirm the fears of some scientists that — because of the depth of the leak and the heavy use of chemical "dispersants" — this spill was behaving differently than others. Instead of floating on top of the water, it may be moving beneath it.

That would be troubling because it could mean the oil would slip past coastal defenses such as "containment booms" designed to stop it on the surface. Already, scientists and officials in Louisiana have reported finding thick oil washing ashore despite the presence of floating booms.

It would also be a problem for hidden ecosystems deep under the gulf. There, scientists say, the oil could be absorbed by tiny animals and enter a food chain that builds to large, beloved sport-fish like red snapper. It might also glom on to deep-water coral formations, and cover the small animals that make up each piece of coral.

"It kills them because it prevents them from feeding," said Professor James H. Cowan Jr., of Louisiana State University. "It could essentially starve them to death."

The University of South Florida vessel, the Weatherbird II, used sonar and other devices to sample the water below it. Other scientists have said they have little of the equipment necessary to find oil under the water — leading to debates about whether the underwater plumes were even there.

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